

Martin Aurell

The Lettered Knight

Knowledge and Aristocratic Behaviour
in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries



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**Knowledge and Aristocratic Behaviour
in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries**

Martin Aurell

*Translated by
Jean-Charles Khalifa and Jeremy Price*



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Contents

Introduction	1
THE RENAISSANCE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY	3
SCHOLASTICISM, READING, AND WRITING	5
‘LITERATURE’ AND ORALITY	8
THE LETTERED AND THE UNLETTERED	13
THE CLERIC AND THE KNIGHT	16
COURTESY AND THE CIVILISATION OF MORES	29
Knighthood and Literacy	35
SCHOOLING AND TEACHING CHILDREN TO READ AND WRITE	39
Sons faced with the choice of taking up arms or the calling of the cloister	41
The first teachers: family, private tutors, and courtly clerics	44
In the monastic, cathedral, and parish schools	50
From cloister to secular life	55
Italian precocity and pragmatic knowledge	58
Methods of learning, new programmes and the spread of writing in the vernacular	62
THE LATIN OF THE KNIGHTS	68
The Latin skills of Anglo-Norman knights	69
The Italian educated nobility	77
Semi-literate laymen	82
Book collectors and patrons	90
Knighthood and Literary Creation	99
THE COURT AND LITERARY SOCIAL LIFE	102
Castles transformed into palaces	103
<i>Halls, rooms, and gardens</i>	104
<i>A literary setting</i>	108

Literature intended for performance	112
<i>Ladies holding salon</i>	113
<i>Dancing, jeux partis, and dialogues</i>	118
Minstrels and professional performers	122
<i>Wide-ranging skills</i>	124
<i>The dissemination of political songs</i>	127
<i>Rivalry with the knights and clerics</i>	129
<i>A more positive image</i>	135
THE KNIGHT WRITERS	145
Songs: a preference for the brief genre	146
<i>The troubadours on love and war</i>	147
<i>Northern trouveres and Germanic Minnesänger</i>	155
Romances, sagas, and other fictional genres: a rare form of writing	157
<i>The Grail, love, and war in French</i>	158
<i>The German ministerials</i>	161
<i>Italy, compilers, and encyclopaedists</i>	166
<i>Snorri Sturluson's sagas</i>	168
<i>Impiety or religiosity?</i>	169
History and memory: telling the Crusade	171
<i>Overseas adventure in oc and ôïl</i>	172
<i>The Catalan-Italian wars around the Mediterranean</i>	177
LEARNED WOMEN	184
The education of girls	184
<i>Preceptors and schools</i>	185
<i>Convent education</i>	188
<i>Disparate educational levels</i>	193
Women readers	196
<i>The indispensable Psalter</i>	197
<i>Receiving love poems and letters</i>	205
Women writers	208
<i>Women epistolarians</i>	209
<i>Marie de France</i>	214
<i>Trobairitz, hagiographers, and visionaries</i>	218
The superiority of feminine knowledge?	223
Clerical Instruction and Civilizing Knightly Mores	229
WAR AND THE CODIFYING OF VIOLENCE	236
The moral of the story	237

Rebuking greed, violence, and vanity	242
<i>Pillaging and murder</i>	242
<i>Hunting, tournaments, and games</i>	247
The chivalrous ideal	254
<i>Warring under the king for peace and justice</i>	254
<i>The knighthood and dubbing</i>	257
<i>Sparing human lives</i>	263
<i>The Crusade as armed pilgrimage</i>	266
<i>The paradox of the soldier monks</i>	270
The internalisation of persuasive arguments?	275
MANNERS: MASTERING MOVEMENT AND SPEECH	281
Courteous clerics	284
Instructional books on civility	289
Clothing and attire	292
<i>Cleanliness and elegance</i>	293
<i>Shame and immodesty</i>	296
Self-control in gestures	300
Table manners	306
The art of pleasant conversation	312
LOVE: REFINEMENT AND SELF-CONTROL	321
The patient, enduring, and meek lover	321
Perfecting oneself through love	327
Classical knowledge and courtly love	333
The debate on knights and clerks in love	342
RELIGION: THE WARRIOR'S PIETY	353
The lettered knights and theological thought	354
Courtliness and piety	357
Mass attendance and the dangers of Pharisaism	360
Meditating at church, invoking the Holy Virgin, and other forms of devotion	365
Love for fellow-men, alms, and voluntary poverty	369
Confession and penance	373
The knight's martyrdom	378
Individuation and nobility of the soul	382
Conclusion	389
Sources and bibliography	401
Index	443

Introduction

In 1279, John de Warenne (d. 1304), earl of Surrey, was summoned by the judges of Edward I. In accordance with the terms of the royal ordinance *Quo warranto* ('By which legal document?'), sent to all of the lordly aristocracy, he had to bring to them the titles of property to his estate. If he was unable to obtain these documents, he would be expropriated. When the court charged him to provide written proof, he held out an old rusty sword and cried:

My Lords, here is my charter! For my ancestors arrived here with William the Bastard and they conquered their lands by this sword, and it is by this same sword that I will defend them against anyone who would occupy them. The king did not conquer this land alone but with the assistance of our ancestors.

This belated addition to the manuscripts of the Augustine canon regular Walter of Guisborough's *Chronical* (d. c. 1305), provides a legendary if not fictitious anecdote (p. 216). It is as distorted as the Warenne genealogical memory, proud of their bellicose origins and of their estate taken by right of conquest. It conveys the typical aristocratic disdain for royal officers whose taxes and justice reduced the privileges of the nobility. It also provides evidence of the earl's scornful attitude towards written proof, which he considers insignificant compared to the sword of his founding ancestor and his renowned lineage.

Does the earl of Surrey exemplify the general attitude of the nobility towards writing? Like him, did warriors hold legal officers and the people who educated them in contempt? Do they systematically show the same philistine attitude? It is true that the barely latent rivalry between knights and clerics sometimes appears in the texts. Their lifestyle and centres of interest are too different. The values by which they intend to guide society diverge in several instances. And yet there is a certain synergy between their respective existences. Born into the same families and social background, the warriors and clerics grew up together and they continued to mix, despite the apparent discordance between their respective statuses.

Moreover, the social and legal context surrounding this anecdote involving John de Warenne qualifies the alleged scorn of the warrior for writing and culture which might make him more effeminate and reduce his battle fury. Firstly, the *Quo warranto* ordinance was one of the most unpopular among the nobles. They contested it and considered John of Warenne leader of their revolt.¹ Secondly, the symbolic object, in this instance the old sword, was a form of legal proof recognized in many cases during the Middle Ages.² Despite his arrogance, the earl's gesture does not indicate disrespect for the charter, nor, *a fortiori*, for writing. It simply reveals the pride of the descendants of the Norman conquerors of England. Their aristocratic and military arrogance is not incompatible with a taste for literature.

In the late thirteenth century, the revolt of the count of Warenne is not exceptional. Everywhere in the West, nobles conspire against the monarchy, whose administrative progress they reject. Some of them know how to compose political songs, which the troubadours call *sirventes*. Their tone is anti-bureaucratic and bellicose, as in those written by the great Provençal baron Boniface of Castellane, one of the leaders of the baronial opposition to central rule. In a poem which he wrote around 1252, he still praises Charles I of Anjou (1245–1285), the new Capetien count of Provence, whom he describes as a ‘perfect knight,’ ‘a collector of swords, shields, helms, hauberks, and armours’ if only he would avoid following the ‘bad advice’ of his entourage (I, l. 36–42). He nevertheless remonstrates against the pacifist documents which issue forth from Charles’ court, arguing rather for the courageous pursuit of war: ‘Well equipped crossbowmen and rows of knights on horseback are much more to my pleasing than legal acts!’ (I, l. 43–45). In 1260, Boniface hardened his attitude, taking up arms against Charles I and his officers and composing another song which begins with passionate praise for combat: ‘I enjoy war, troubles, and quarrels’ (II, l. 1). At the end of the opening verse he contrasts the worries the new bureaucracy brings with the exultation of military combat: ‘But as regards legal proceedings, I understand less each day (l. 7).’ In the second verse he criticizes investigations in the counties to determine the extent of the property owned and income received where these investigations are to the detriment of the aristocratic lords: ‘It annoys me to see these inspectors who go about in such large groups and I detest the advice of the investigating prelates, for I never saw one joyous

¹ Crouch, ‘The Warenne Family.’

² Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record*, 35–39.

man among them. When we present our rights to them, they say that they are worth nothing and that absolutely everything belongs to the count,' master of all Provence (l. 8–14). The increased administration and the burgeoning bureaucracy that it produced were indeed detrimental to the power and estate of Boniface, whose revolt led to his expropriation and exile. As a troubadour who composed and performed poetry, Boniface would naturally not have criticized letters as such, but rather the end of a world of chivalry in which wars raged between the nobility themselves. He therefore objected to the various acts, laws, surveys, and accounts which more and more reserved a monopoly of recourse to violence to the prince. It would nevertheless be wholly wrong to suggest that he rejected writing itself.

THE RENAISSANCE OF THE TWELFTH CENTURY

The Renaissance began in the twelfth century.³ It flourished in the following century and continued until the end of the Middle Ages and beyond. Yet its birth has wrongly been placed in the sixteenth century. Perhaps we have been deluded by the fame of Italian art, the invention of printing and the anthropocentric nature of modern philosophy. But this view fails to take into account the vast movement of cultural renewal which began in Western Europe in the twelfth century, if not even earlier. It was around this time that the number of schools and universities began to multiply. The subjects which were taught diversified. The number of writers and books increased. The copying of manuscripts and their circulation accelerated. Men of letters began to obtain easier access to the texts of the Stoics Cicero and Seneca, the poets Virgil, Horace and Ovid, the grammarians Quintilian and Priscian. Translators worked unceasingly and provided those who could read Latin with the entire works of Aristotle whose realism began to replace the idealism of Plato and Augustine. Philosophy and theology started to open up increasingly to the reasoning of logic, thereby becoming 'scholastic' or 'scholarly', in other words taught rationally in urban schools through dialectic debate.

The new speculative method contrasted with the traditional commentaries on the Bible previously carried out by monks under the authority of Early Church Fathers. In the solitude of their monasteries, far from the hustle and bustle of the towns, the monks remained loyal in their studies

³ Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*; Verger, *La Renaissance du XIIe siècle*.

to the patristic tradition, whose unique goal was the quest for the love of God and the contemplation of his essence.⁴ Yet, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the ancient wisdom of the coenobites was overtaken by the new science of the urban thinkers. The spokesman for the old monastic culture, the Cistercian monk Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153), reproaches Peter Abelard (1079–1142), the most notable intellectual of his time, for approaching eternal truths in a way which is too rational, too clear headed, or even flat, thus destroying *their* mystery. He thus criticizes him for ‘not knowing them in an enigma by means of a mirror’ (1 Cor, 13, 12: Videmus nunc per speculum in ænigmate), but rather ‘seeing them already “face to face”, full of vanity and puffed up with pride’ (ep. 192). This suggests an opposition between, on the one hand, the wisdom of the Old Testament, as a personification of divinity and a spiritual guide, and, on the other, modern knowledge which is disconnected and hollow, thereby encouraging arrogance amongst the followers of such knowledge. Saint Bernard’s inflammatory diatribe is deceptive and has sometimes been used by medievalists to excessively harden the opposing lines between the monks and the schools, whereas they in fact constantly exerted a mutual influence on each other. Firstly, a new generation of monastic scholars used recent knowledge, acquired from the urban schools they attended when they were young, to build a speculative theology which continued to seek for mystic union to God.⁵ Secondly, even if they defined themselves as ‘modern’ (derived from the Latin *modo* ‘now’), the urban thinkers described their era not in terms of a ‘renaissance’, or a starting anew, but as a ‘renewal’, ‘reform’, or ‘restoration’, thus using the analogy of the seasonal spring regeneration of dormant vegetation, or the Church continuing to produce the fruits of sanctity.⁶ They describe themselves as dwarves seated on the shoulders of giants—a reference to the learning of their predecessors—and it is only from this higher vantage point that they are able to see further than their predecessors.⁷ By no means did they lay claim to having made a clean slate of the past, but rather to have revived a tradition which they respected and admired.

⁴ Leclercq, *L’Amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu*, 72, 189–211.

⁵ Gilson, *La Philosophie au Moyen Âge*, 292–301.

⁶ Ladner, ‘Terms and Ideas of Renewal’.

⁷ Jeuneau, ‘*Nani gigantum humeris insidentes*’.

SCHOLASTICISM, READING, AND WRITING

The twelfth-century Renaissance was not a narrow phenomenon which originated among some closed group of intellectuals. It was, on the contrary, carried forward by a general movement which affected the whole of society. The Church also carried out a crucial reform which reinforced the moral, spiritual, and cultural demands of the clergy. These demands were materialized in the new pastoral role that the secular priests and the members of the new orders—the canons regular and then in the thirteenth century the Franciscans, Dominicans, and other mendicant orders—presented in their teaching and preaching to lay people whose church-going habits became more frequent.⁸ Henceforth, the laity were welcome in the vast naves of the Gothic churches.

At that time, the kings asserted their power with the help of officers who had sometimes attended the clergy schools. Their collecting of taxes and exercise of justice became more efficient. Their influence made roads safer. Trade developed and towns increased in size. The remarkable figure of the intellectual now appeared in the towns, earning a living exclusively from knowledge. The traders, bankers, and tradesmen grew rich. They took advantage of the rural production. Indeed, over several decades the forests were cleared to create more arable land. People were better fed and the size of the population increased. Greater control over a formerly hostile nature was one of the main reasons for their optimistic conception of their own existence, but also of Creation which they viewed in a less sacred light.⁹ This was an era of humanism before its time.

Reading and writing also developed. They had not yet become widespread,¹⁰ but their expansion followed, and even overtook, the tremendous pace of demographic growth. Several indicators would seem to prove this. The parish schools multiplied, even in villages. The number of twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuscripts that survive today in European libraries is incomparably superior to those from previous decades. The documents of that era bear witness to a reduction in production costs.¹¹ This was due to the appearance of scribal workshops in towns which took over

⁸ Vauchez, *La Spiritualité du Moyen Âge occidental*, 133–144.

⁹ Chenu, *La Théologie au XIIe siècle*, 19–51.

¹⁰ By way of comparison, admittedly without hard evidence to back it, it has been estimated that in 1750 only ten percent of the population of Europe could read and write, a proportion which increased to fifty percent around 1850, Cipolla, *Literacy and Development in the West*, 8, 55.

¹¹ In Catalonia, which is particularly well documented, a parchment book cost half the price of a horse in the eleventh century as against one fiftieth just a century later, Zimmermann, *Écrire et lire en Catalogne (IXe-XIIe siècle)*, 479–480.

from the small number of monastic *scriptoria* which had previously copied works for local use. In the universities, the adoption of the *pecia* system (etymologically referring to an unbound notebook), by which parts were copied independently from the whole book, speeded up the production of manuscripts. In the northern parts of the Mediterranean, paper became much cheaper than parchment for writing. Paper was made in the Iberian Peninsula and in Italy in the thirteenth century and its spread facilitated the emergence of a class of notaries whose transcriptions provided a written record of all types of contracts and transactions.

Writing also evolved in its most literal form. The round and carefully shaped Carolingian minuscules, with a clean break between each letter, were replaced by Gothic cursive, a script which was more angular but above all quicker to write, since the scribe's hand no longer had to be raised between characters but could now be linked in one flowing movement. The greater speed of hand movement accelerated manuscript production. Of even greater importance, according to the medieval specialist Paul Saenger, was the disappearance of *scriptura continua*, which avoided spaces between words. If we are to believe Saenger, more independent writing techniques allowed certain authors to write directly on parchment or paper without having to dictate their text to an intermediary scribe who would first put down a draft version on wax tablets. Silent reading also became more widespread: reading aloud became unnecessary since each individual word became recognizable at a glance.¹²

Two other experts have noticed similar changes. Pierre Gallais claims that the use, in French, of the verb '*veoir*', from 1250 onwards, to designate the act of reading, refers exclusively to eye movements since the reader no longer needs to read words out loud nor even make any lip movements.¹³ Meanwhile Jacqueline Hamesse suggests that 'scholastic reading' in the true sense begins in the twelfth century.¹⁴ This coincided

¹² Saenger, *Space Between Words: The Origins of Silent Reading*. Two other hypotheses put forward by this same author require qualification. The first suggests that the multiplication of autobiographies in the thirteenth century was also due to this new technique, since the writer was henceforth able to write alone in private without fear of the judgment of his scribe. The second establishes a connection between the demise of *scriptura continua* and the emergence of the schools and the subtlety of their reasoning, to which he connects silent reflection and even the success of nominalist philosophy in which the word and the concept come together. These explanations ignore the vital role of oral argumentation in the new philosophical and theological method.

¹³ 'Recherches sur la mentalité des romanciers', 486.

¹⁴ 'Le modèle scolastique de lecture', 131–135.

with the adoption in the schools, around 1150, of the term *lectura* to designate the explanation of difficult portions of text. She suggests that it justifies also the distinction established by the scholar and future bishop of Chartres, John of Salisbury (1115-1180), in his *Metalogicon* between *lectio*, or private reading, and *prælectio*, or public reading with explanations and commentary provided by a specialist (I, 24). Generally speaking, reading techniques became more efficient and pragmatic than the *ruminatio* (the slow, regular, and in-depth meditation on texts) previously employed by monks to learn the Bible and other books written by the Fathers of the Early Church.

New referencing systems facilitated the use of manuscripts. Divisions, paragraphs, headings, concordances, tables, and indexes allowed books to be consulted rapidly and efficiently and ideas and quotations to be quickly located. It was at this period, for instance, that the Bible was systematically divided up into chapters, perhaps by the exegete Stephen Langton (d. 1228), a Paris professor and later archbishop of Canterbury. The multiplication of the number of works produced compared to the preceding centuries made these new techniques absolutely essential, thus leading to the 'fragmented reading of many books',¹⁵ in which a specific reference or piece of information was sought. Part of the same movement was the birth of true libraries for the consultation and borrowing of books, and no longer merely for the preservation of heritage works and rare 'monuments' (in the classical sense of written records commemorating a past deed) to be read over and over until the reader had had his fill. In a similar vein, the invention of spectacles in the 1270s corrected presbyopia, thus increasing readers' visual longevity.

Most medieval specialists consider that an important mental transformation took place in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Reading, like writing, was no longer restricted to monks or a privileged few who moved in the courtly circles of the royal or ecclesiastical elite. By losing some of its religious and contemplative focus, reading became more private, more rational, and more critical.¹⁶ It spread more than ever before among lay people, above all among the dominant social class par excellence, the aristocracy. These were momentous developments in Western cultural history.

¹⁵ Cavallo and Chartier, 'Introduction', 28.

¹⁶ 'Le livre, objet matériel qui donnait forme à la raison et aux textes, pénétra plus profondément le monde occidental au cours de la période scolastique, se séparant du Livre et du Verbe', Boureau, *L'Empire du livre: pour une histoire du savoir scolastique*, 300.

‘LITERATURE’ AND ORALITY

Reading and writing play a key role in the development of societies which adopt them, or at any rate within societies in which they come to be used increasingly among their members. Ethnologists and historians have long studied their role in social organization and the transformations produced by their development on government, hierarchy, exchange, and work within human groups. They have particularly focused on the new world view of those who adopt reading and writing, on the transformation of certain of their cognitive operations such as their ability to accumulate knowledge or their capacity for abstract thought, and also on the potential for better communication and government bestowed upon those who have mastered the art of reading and writing. Since the end of the nineteenth century, at least, researchers in this field coined neologisms such as *literacy* in English and *Schriftlichkeit* in German, which would seem to have designated initially literacy as such but subsequently, by metonymy, any social projection of reading and writing. Yet it is only in the first decade of the twenty-first century that a handful of French specialists have ventured to create the equivalent terms ‘Littératie’ or ‘Scripturalité’.¹⁷ The scholarly field of ‘Literacy’ does not always cover the history of thought or the history of ideas. It does not directly involve the intellectual or artistic elite, or the content of their philosophy or their literature. Above all, it covers collective uses of reading and writing, dealing as much with philosophical, historiographical, or poetic sources as with diplomatic or administrative ones.

In the field of medieval history, the first studies to deal directly with literacy were published in English between the two world wars. In 1935, a long article by the Oxford professor Vivian H. Galbraith, and in 1939 a book by the Berkeley professor James W. Thompson, analysed this aspect of the culture of the kings and the high aristocracy. The novelty of these two publications lies in the fact that they deal exclusively with the writing ability of the laity, whereas since the nineteenth century studies had focused on the school system which educated the clergy in the Middle Ages. These two works in turn bring to mind the article on the education of merchants published by the Belgian scholar Henri Pirenne in the first issue of the periodical *Annales* in 1929. All of these authors held literacy to be one of the main steps in the progress of mankind, a point of view which was

¹⁷ Translations supervised by J.-M. Privat: Goody, *Pouvoirs et savoirs de l'écrit*; Morsel, ‘Ce qu’écriture veut dire au Moyen Âge’.

considerably qualified by the following generation. They did, however, carry out pioneering work in the finding of documents and their descriptions of the cultural behaviour of the secular elite.

But it is only at the end of the 1970s that original hypotheses begin to enrich the field of the formal or material study of medieval writings, which had until then appeared to be relegated to the functional status of a mere auxiliary science in the service of history, similar to paleography, epigraphy, diplomatics, or codicology. This renewal originated in part from the work of anthropologists who studied societies where writing was largely absent. One of the most influential among them, Jack Goody, defined such civilizations through their 'restricted literacy'. He suggests that this restriction of literacy reflects a culture of writing which does not fully exploit the technical possibilities of the alphabet, which is mastered only by a small group of individuals, and which is scarcely used outside religion. This is why the book enjoys an almost magical status in these types of societies.¹⁸

One of the characteristics of the anthropological method is its cultural relativism as regards moral or social issues. This is why its proponents avoid any positive judgment on the achievement of learning to read and to write. They consider that oral communication is of no less value than written communication and that either of these means for communicating a message would seem to have an identical material effect. Writing becomes thus as 'spiritual' as Speaking. This levelling is apparent in the expressions used by Walter J. Ong, another leading expert, who opposes 'chirographic culture' to 'oral culture' and 'visual presence' to 'sound'.¹⁹ Moreover, again from an ethnological perspective, the spread of writing did not automatically bring benefits to specific social groups. In a well-known passage from *A World on the Wane* (*Tristes tropiques*, 1955) on the development of mankind's first slave empires, Claude Lévi-Strauss goes so far as to suggest that 'we have to assume that the primary function of written communication is to facilitate enslavement' (p. 344). A similar theoretical stance is adopted in Michael T. Clanchy's seminal work, published in 1979, on the transition from oral memory to the written document in England between 1066 and 1307. Over the period covered by his study, 'lay literacy grew out of bureaucracy, rather than from any abstract desire for education or literature' (p. 19). English political leaders would

¹⁸ *La Raison graphique: la domestication de la pensée sauvage*, and more recently *Pouvoirs*, 21.

¹⁹ *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word*, 2.

thus seem to have developed writing for the strictly utilitarian purpose of controlling or enrolling, two words whose etymology refers specifically to the parchment rolls of the Crown administration. Clanchy's work, which has curiously never been translated into French, is all the more impressive thanks to the author's considerable knowledge of archival and diplomatic sources and the wide-ranging overall analyses which are reflected in his exploration of the topic.

A series of books published by Armando Petrucci, Paolo Cammarosano and Guglielmo Cavallo between the years 1980–2000 take a similar approach in exploiting the wealth of Italian documentary sources available. Meanwhile in Germany, the *Schriftlichkeit* approach focuses on the notion of *memoria*, or memory as preserved in writing after the comprehensive collective rewriting of recorded events. There are fewer French studies on this topic. However, Michel Zimmermann's 2003 publication *Écrire et lire en Catalogne (IXe–XIIe siècle)* provides a 1400 page study on reading and writing in Catalonia from the ninth to the twelfth centuries: the book unveils the culture of a literate society during a period in which its identity is profoundly transforming. The list of recent scholarly articles is considerably longer.²⁰ Nowadays, 'literacy' arouses greater interest among medieval specialists due to their greater interest in a postmodern approach to documents. Abandoning an outdated positivism which considered the source to be an accurate reflection of historical events, they now read these texts rather as social constructions which follow the rules of their literary genre and borrow from other documents. They therefore take the document to be an object of study in itself, rather than a means of gaining access to an impenetrable past. As a result, they encourage a renewed attention to texts, by exploring the way in which they were written, read and distributed.

The notion of 'literacy' cannot be fully understood without considering 'orality'. The spoken word pre-existed writing and the latter still remains an exception in everyday communication. This is particularly the case from a historical perspective. Indeed, among the tens of thousands of languages spoken down through the ages only a hundred or so dead languages have left written texts. All oral discourse typically presents certain specific characteristics, all the more so if it transmits knowledge of the world or fictional narrative: it proceeds by accumulating facts and explanation rather than by subordinating them to analytical or hierarchical precepts; it is repetitive, lacking in concision; it accumulates knowledge con-

²⁰ For recent clarification see Chastang, 'L'archéologie du texte médiéval'.

servatively, according respect as long as the knowledge in question stems from tradition; it repeats proverbs, mnemonic formulae, and ready-made expressions; it is concrete, down to earth, close to everyday life, removed from abstraction, and so forth. Lastly, oral exchange demands the physical presence of the interlocutors. It therefore grants importance to the empathy stemming from the authority of the speaker in terms of his or her social rank and body movements, whereas writing provides a certain detachment.²¹ The impact of this physical interaction is particularly felt in the field of education, since the absence of the printed book prevents any self-taught study. In such a context, it is only through the spoken word that the teacher instructs his pupil. Basically, in a society without writing, the individual is firmly embedded in family, tribal or village communities from which he will continually derive knowledge or learning.

Pure orality no longer existed in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Western cultures. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, because writing had been present in one form or another for the preceding two thousand years; secondly, the activity of the Church, with its constant recourse to the Bible and to patristic and liturgical books, affected society as a whole. Despite this, the rate of literacy remained very low. Moreover, reading and writing were activities where the spoken voice continued to play a predominant role. For their religious education, the Christian population depended on the preaching of priests who prepared their sermons from books in which they took their own notes. The dissidents and heretics, for their part, formed a 'textual community,' to borrow Brian Stock's convenient expression: they gathered around a 'literate interpreter' who would read and explain revelatory literature to them.²² It was fairly common for authors, whether religious or secular, to dictate their texts to a scribe. Fictional works were read out loud to a sophisticated audience who would discuss the book together. University education was also based on a similar model, with lecturers reading and commenting on lines from the philosophers and theologians to their students, who, in turn, took down what they heard in the form of notes. The students were rarely able to consult the source works directly; they learnt to argue through *disputatio* or debate; and all their examinations were oral examinations.

Many other examples can be found of the interaction between 'scripturality' and orality. This is why the medievalist Paul Zumthor, author of a splendid book with the apt title *La Lettre et la voix* ('The Letter and the

²¹ Ong, 'Orality, Literacy, and Medieval Textualization', 5, and *Orality*, 31–77.

²² *The Implications of Literacy*, 88–240.

Voice', 1987), uses the terms 'mixed orality' or 'secondary orality' to designate medieval poetry which undergoes, respectively, the influence of writing, or which is reconstituted orally from writing (pp. 18–19). He also suggests it is time to discard the old idea of a clear distinction between popular, low brow, oral literature as opposed to high brow, literary, and written literature (pp. 8, 132). At the time in question, most works of fiction existed only in performance, when they were recited in public by a juggler or a storyteller. They survived mostly owing to oral tradition. Indeed, the manuscripts to which a minority owe their preservation allow us to glimpse only the tip of a poetic iceberg which has been lost forever.

In most civilizations, spoken language and written language differ significantly. This was also the case in the West during the medieval period, and this divergence further separated 'literacy' and 'orality'. Before 1130, all writing, with a few rare exceptions, was in Latin. But around this date the Norman conquerors in England began to write the first texts in French, a language reserved for communication with the Continent and spoken only by a French speaking minority in a mainly English or Celtic speaking environment.²³ This exceptional context explains why, in the British Isles, the Anglo-Norman dialect even enjoyed a 'vernacular authority'²⁴ to the detriment of Latin, in a way observed nowhere else in the West. In the following period, a handful of profane texts, mostly poetry or romances, were written in Romance or German in the main Western kingdoms. Up until around 1210 they were all written in verse. The use of prose in a small number of texts may perhaps indicate the advance of silent reading as against recital. Prose was above all a guarantee of truthfulness, seriousness, and religiousness, as opposed to rhyme which was at that time considered more superficial, recreational, or secular.²⁵

The appearance of the vernacular languages in manuscripts was, however, limited. Latin remained much more widespread in written communication, both among the clerics and among princely officers and notaries. Among intellectuals Latin enjoyed the unrivalled prestige conferred by ancient Rome and its classics. It was the almost sacrosanct language of the liturgy and of the Vulgate (the translation of the Bible by Saint Jerome (c. 340–420) which was long used by the Western Church), thereby putting it on an equal footing with Hebrew and Greek. It also helped overcome the dialect differences between various Romance and Germanic languages

²³ Short, 'Patrons and Polyglots'.

²⁴ Damian-Grint, *The New Historians of the Twelfth-Century Renaissance*.

²⁵ Zumthor, *La Lettre et la voix*, 203, 304–305.

which, by dividing nations from each other, tended to perpetuate the original transgression of the builders of Babel. The children of wealthy families therefore learnt to read and write through Latin, even if it required more time and effort. When they wrote in the vernacular, their Latin training was a hindrance, for they spontaneously associated vernacular words with their Latin etymology as evidenced by the numerous mute vowels and consonants in their manuscripts.²⁶ This clumsiness is compounded by the intellectuals' discomfort when writing in a common or 'vernacular' language subject to the vagaries of local dialects and accessible to all and sundry.

THE LETTERED AND THE UNLETTERED

Not only was Latin almost the sole language of writing, it was also the vehicle for all book-based knowledge. This monopoly provided significant authority to those who mastered Latin, thereby creating a fundamental division in medieval culture, as was first suggested in a groundbreaking article by Herbert Grundmann published in 1958. Grundmann was a German medievalist who argued that the literate-illiterate (*litteratus-illitteratus*) pairing, which was synonymous with having, or not having, knowledge of Latin, provided an indication of the frontier between the learned and the ignorant in medieval texts. More generally, this division increased the gap between the clergy and the laity, since only the former (with a few rare exceptions) knew Latin, the language of reading and writing.²⁷ Thanks to Latin, they were able to learn the seven 'liberal' or noble arts: the *trivium* (grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric) and the *quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music). Their concern was with spiritual affairs and in no way with material affairs as was the case for the manual and mechanical arts. Classical and theological training was therefore the prerogative of the clergy. In 1152, the monk Nicolas of Montiéramy sent a letter to his protector Henry I, count of Champagne (1152–1181), in which he boasted of his astonishing knowledge to a prince. He quoted 'the old proverb, the sentence celebrated by the ancients: the lettered people (*litterati*) are as different from the laity (*laici*) as mankind is from beasts' (ep. 56). A huge cultural gap therefore separated the two categories.

²⁶ Duval, 'Le Moyen Âge', *Mille ans de langue française*, 228, 252.

²⁷ Congar, 'Clercs et laïcs du point de vue de la culture au Moyen Âge'.

In canon law, the difference between the clerics and the laity was equally wide. When explaining in his opusculum *The Scandal* why the Church excommunicated fornicating priests but not members of the laity who committed the same sin, the theologian Honorius Augustodunensis (c. 1080–c. 1156) used a colourful image: ‘The priestly order is as different from the laymen as light is from darkness’ (§38). A sharp distinction is upheld in Gratian’s *Decretum* (c. 1140). ‘These two types of Christians’ (*Duo genera christianorum*, XII, 1, 7) had different functions in the Church. The clerics had tonsures and their crown became the symbol of the royalty of religious vocation and of the perfection of the circle. They were thus able to enter the cathedral schools and the universities,²⁸ which led to the office of *ostiarius* (usher), reader or exorcist, and perhaps later, around the age of twenty-five, to one of the major orders (subdeacon, deacon, or priest), for which celibacy was a requirement. It was their duty to carry out the offices of divine worship and to take responsibility for the religious education of the faithful. They wore long clothes and were banned from carrying weapons. If they committed a crime and chose to be judged by the ecclesiastical courts (in order to avoid the civil courts), their tonsure or their mastery of Latin provided sufficient proof of their clerical status. The second category, the laity, was a preponderant majority. They made up the ‘people’ (the Greek etymology of ‘laity’) of Christendom.

The vocabulary of the period quite clearly distinguished these two semantic fields. On the one hand, there was the *litteratus* or *clericus*, and, on the other, the *illitteratus*, *laicus*, *vulgus*, *indoctus*, or *idiotia*. Such a hierarchy can be found in the prologues of hagiographical works in the vernacular. The Norman scholar Wace (1100–1174) begins his *Life of Saint Nicholas* with the following words: ‘The clerics must teach religion to the unlettered [...]. I mean in the romance vernacular some of what the Latin tells us in order to instruct the laity who cannot understand’ (l. 1–3, 41–43). Around 1160, also in Normandy, Guillaume de Saint-Pair, a monk from the Mont-Saint-Michel, said that he wanted to translate the history of his monastery for the pilgrims ‘who had no “clergy” (*clergie*)’ (l. 11). The latter term, with its revealing root, designated in old French scholarly culture. In addition, medieval thinkers did not base their conception of translation on accuracy compared to the original: in old French, *translater* means ‘to transfer’, to transpose the meaning of a text, or even modify or

²⁸ At the end of the Middle Ages the tonsure was no longer required for university education. By the end of the fourteenth century, only a third of students received the tonsure. Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, 264.

augment it, in order to adapt it to the needs and expectations of its intended public. The clerics therefore needed to justify their vernacular translations which they considered less worthy than their Latin works. In order to do this, they laid stress on the pedagogical aims of their pastoral instruction as intended for the laity. But renouncing Latin was not the only concession they were prepared to make in order to make themselves understood by the laity, for they also accepted the transmission of a diluted version of their philosophy. In his *Commentary on the Prophet Joel*, the Dominican theologian Albertus Magnus (c. 1193–1280) speaks of coarse nourishment being thrown to the laity, in the same way barley is thrown to animals (1, 11). The clergy meanwhile enjoyed a quite different form of intellectual nourishment.

The discourse of the tonsured scholars is in similar vein when they describe the paintings which adorn church walls or the pages of religious books. In their view the purpose of images is to teach eternal truths to their spectators, to move them, to bring them to conversion, and to help them recollect scenes of the lives of Christ and the saints.²⁹ For this purpose they quote a well-known letter sent by Gregory the Great (d. 604) to Bishop Serenus of Marseilles: ‘That which writing brings to those who know how to read, is given to the uneducated who look at a painting; the ignorant see in a painting what they must do, and in a painting the illiterate may read’ (XI, 10). Again, in one of his letters written in 1160, John of Salisbury rejoices in having contemplated in the basilica of Saint John Lateran a collection of portraits of various Popes trampling upon antipopes, ‘in which the laity read in visible paintings’ (ep. 124, p. 208). Another Englishman, Matthew Paris (1200–1259), a monk from Saint Albans (Hertfordshire), claims to have translated *The History of Saint Edward the King* (1236–1239) for the edification of Queen Eleanor of Provence (l. 73–88). He illustrated this translation with sixty-four illuminations, which he may himself have painted, together with their respective rubrics, in order to help the dedicatee towards a better comprehension of the text. According to some clerical writers, the laity who are incapable of reading Latin, or even incapable of reading at all, have to be instructed with the help of translations and images which allow them better to understand the message they intend. It was thus only for pedagogical purposes that they designed to use the vernacular and images.

²⁹ For a more recent publication see Baschet, *L’Iconographie médiévale*, 28–31.

THE CLERIC AND THE KNIGHT

The idea of a rigid distinction between the literate vs. the illiterate or of the cleric vs. the layman needs to be qualified. We need not blindly accept the discriminatory oppositions of the medieval thinkers who were so proud of their literacy and contemptuous of all those whom they considered ignorant. Nor should we instinctively accept the rules which are decreed with such clarity and precision by the specialists of canon law and which are often disconnected from social practices. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the cultural reality would seem to have been more variable and more complex. Firstly, the scholars were more or less scholarly. In the *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury insists that the term 'literate' (*litterati*) should not be applied without restriction to those who have learnt Latin, but should be reserved exclusively for those who have a knowledge of the liberal arts (I, 24). Secondly, the term 'cleric' (*clericus*) remains somewhat ambiguous, because it also includes the notion of being a scholar, in addition to the notion of being tonsured or ordained. However, a layman could also learn Latin and acquire knowledge from books with the help of a private tutor or in a school. This was why the Premonstratensian abbot Philip of Harvengt (d. 1183), in his *Instruction of Clerks*, wrote that 'by an impropriety of language, someone who devotes himself to letters, which is the very nature of a cleric's activities, is called a 'cleric', despite the fact that he may not necessarily be a cleric'. He goes so far as to compare a "literate knight" with an "ignorant priest": 'If someone were to compare a 'literate knight' (*miles litteratus*) with an 'ignorant priest' (*idiota presbyter*), he could say with certainty and swear under oath that the knight knows more than the priest, because he can read, understand, dictate, and write verse in Latin, and because he can communicate in Latin with priests' (IV, 110).

A few lines further on, Harvengt once again mentions the knight, who, by virtue of the sword he puts on and the horse he mounts, belongs to the equestrian order or to the knighthood (*militia, professio militaris*, IV, 111). In the writings of the clerics at Harvengt's time, the notion of knighthood referred to warriors from the nobility who had received the accolade or dubbing. This initiation rite, through which the young warrior joined the world of adult warriors, involved the presenting of the sword and dubbing. It was accompanied by blessings, prayers and vigils of a profoundly Christianizing nature. However, by the end of the twelfth century, knighthood, or better chivalry, did not only designate a noble army of dubbed warriors. It was also synonymous with their ethics, with a value

system which seems common to aristocratic warriors all over the world and times: solidarity between the members of the same army, bravery in the face of the enemy, respect for defeated nobility, generosity when distributing bounty, loyalty to the leader, contempt for non-combatants, a passion for tournaments, games, and parades, and so on. Dominique Barthélemy's *La Chevalerie* ('Chivalry'), published in 2007, explores in detail descriptions of this code of behaviour through texts dating back to the early Middle Ages. Such conduct, however, should not be regarded as peculiar to one particular society. If we take into account studies in cultural anthropology, it becomes clear that the ways conflict was initiated and dealt with were not exclusive to medieval knights. It is indeed similar to the way violence is exercised by dominant warrior groups in many primitive or even pre-industrial societies.

The undeniable value which such ethnological insight contributes should, however, not prevent the historian from exploring the specific characteristics of twelfth- and thirteenth-century chivalry. During that period the ideology and the composition of the group which embodied knighthood were equally transformed. This reorganization was largely due to the collapse of the public institutions of the Carolingian Empire and to the division of power which followed, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, within the system of lordship, lineage, and feudalism. The knights at this point usurped for them the previous political thinking of royalty, under which the holders of power to command and to punish were pledged to re-establish order and peace on earth.³⁰ But from the end of the twelfth century, the return in force of the monarchy, the ordering of society and the institutionalization of hierarchical divisions changed well-passably the mentality, rules, rites, and behaviour of the aristocratic knights.

Developments within the Church paralleled the evolution of the knightly class. Priests participated increasingly in the liturgy of the dubbing. Their texts and sermons provided a framework within which warriors were justified in their exercise of armed violence. From 1170 onwards, this clerical involvement led to the establishment of a code of knightly conduct which remained in force for several centuries, as was pointed out in an important publication by David Crouch in 2005.³¹ The clerics admonished the aristocratic warriors to fight only under princely orders, to uphold law and order, to protect the weak, to avoid fighting amongst Christians, to refrain from

³⁰ Flori, *L'Idéologie du glaive*.

³¹ *The Birth of Nobility*, 29–95.

cruelty and to participate in Crusades. These duties are summarized in the *Policraticus*, a treatise on political philosophy written by John of Salisbury in 1159 which focuses on royal government and on the reform of the habits and customs of the knights and courtiers who advised the king: 'What is the purpose of disciplined knights? To protect the Church, to combat treachery, to venerate the priesthood, to protect the poor from injustice, to pacify the country, to shed their blood to defend their brothers as required by their oath and, if necessary, to lay down their lives' (VI, 8). They were at the top of the social hierarchy, and they placed their arms at the service of ideals formulated by the clerical intellectuals. Chivalry was a warrior ethic steeped in Christian values.

Entry to knighthood was through the ceremony of dubbing, in the same way that clergy was entered through the ceremony of the tonsure. Just as for the priesthood, the idea of order was inherent to the warrior class, both in the sense of ordination or initiation and through membership of a professional group obligated to carrying out a particular function. In the *Story of the Grail* (1181–1190), the cleric Chrétien de Troyes says that the act of dubbing confers on Perceval 'the order of knighthood which is the highest that God has established and ordained' (l. 1635–1637). A generation later, the writers who retell Perceval's story in their own prose romances mention 'the holy order of knighthood' or 'heavenly knighthood', in an attempt to provide a closer description of the supernatural calling of the knights.³² The sublime nature of their mission places the knights at the summit of the human hierarchy second only to the clerics. In his treatise entitled *The Four Ages of Man* (c. 1264), the lawyer, Philip of Novara, a Lombard knight based in Cyprus, considers these orders to be 'the two highest and most respectable for God and for the world', and that their merits open the way, respectively, to the papacy and to kingship (§14). A decade later, the Franciscan Tertiary Raymond Lull (1235–1315) claims, in *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*, written in Catalan, that 'the office of the knight is, after that of the cleric, the highest which exists' (V). A French poetic allegory on the states composing society from the same period maintains that 'both the cleric and the knight have the duty to govern the world: the cleric must educate all persons, and the knight must defend them.'³³ The spreading of religious knowledge and armed protection to the benefit of the merchants, craftsmen, and peasants who together

³² Girbea, *La Couronne ou l'auréole*.

³³ Bodleian Library (Oxford), ms Douce 210, fol. 7, quoted by Hunt, 'The Emergence', 105.

make up the third order, reinforced the social preponderance of the clergy and knighthood.³⁴

These writings sometimes reflect a proximity between the first two orders in the field of culture. The poet Baudri de Bourgueil (1046–1130), for example, recognizes that the great Cicero was ‘a knight and a member of the equestrian order’ (134, l. 1139–1140), despite the fact, he says, that his contemporaries hardly considered him as such. Baudri’s clerical outlook did therefore not prevent him from associating the great master of rhetoric (which was the most noble of the arts of the *trivium*) with knightly status. Written in Normandy around 1150, the prologue of the *Romance of Thebes* considers that only these two groups will be able to understand the book: ‘Everyone should fall silent on this subject, except the clergy and the knights, because the rest are unable to participate, or only in the manner of a donkey playing the harp!’ (l. 13–16). Intellectual elitism was again the rule here.³⁵ It is formulated in this allusion to an ancient Greek fable which ends with a refined musician (playing the most aristocratic of instruments) being aped by an animal unable to appreciate the learned artistry which it claims to practice. It is therefore for the tonsured to translate ancient tales into French (expressed as ‘putting [them] into a romance or novel’, i.e., into a Romance language) and for the dubbed to listen to and comment upon such tales in the company of the tonsured. For the anonymous author of the *Romance of Thebes*, the knights’ literary culture is taken as a fact, whether it stems from listening to works being read out aloud or perhaps also from their own personal readings. The aesthetic taste and classical education which were essential to enable such works to be appreciated were common to the two higher orders. The learned allusions of a rich and complex romance and the aesthetic pleasure it conveyed were their sole preserve, to the exclusion of the uneducated who were not able to attain such higher appreciation.³⁶

If the author of the *Romance of Thebes* bids the commoners to remain silent, it is also because their vulgar speech and clumsiness may give pain to his own ears. Around 1218, in his *Romance of Fergus*, written in the Anglo-Norman dialect, Guillaume le Clerc provides a parody of the as-

³⁴ Duby, ‘Les trois ordres’.

³⁵ This example is identical to the ‘good knights (*vrume Rîter*, l. 14695)’ and the ‘wise clerics (*wise Phaffen*, l. 14696)’, in *The Italian Host among the Germans* (1215–1216) by Thomasin von Zerklare. D. Rocher (*Thomasin*, 85–91) points out, however, that the actual readership of this didactical work was wider than the readership suggested in the epilogue.

³⁶ Bourdieu, *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, 583–585.

cension of his hero, the son of a wealthy Scottish farmer, to the summit of knighthood. He is said 'to begin to proclaim wicked things as is usual among peasants' (l. 478-479). It is the same outlook as we have seen reflected in the *Romance of Thebes* by the example of the donkey playing the harp. By contrast, another of its main characters represents both the knight and the cleric mentioned in its prologue: Amphiaraus, the pagan archbishop, who is as cognizant of the secrets of nature and of future events as he is hardy in war. The god Vulcan adorns his battle chariot with allegories of the seven liberal arts (l. 2122, 5145-5159). Amphiaraus even takes his proud pretension of military power and cosmic knowledge to the Promethean level. On the day of his death, which he already knows, he is intent on carrying out a grandscale massacre. God holds this hubris against him and has the earth swallow him down to hell (l. 5228-5240). The moral of this story is probably that power and knowledge, if they are used without measure and discernment, may lead to pride and ruin.

The proximity between the cleric and the knight corresponds to the arrangement within aristocratic families who intend their eldest sons for knightly activities and their younger sons for study. Around 1200, three-quarters of the masters teaching in Parisian schools, which will be soon transformed into a University, were from the nobility, among whom one quarter were from the high aristocracy.³⁷ By grace of their lineage, aristocratic siblings, whether dubbed or tonsured, considered themselves superior to common mortals. Even if to some extent mitigated by the evangelical idea of the radical equality of all those who were baptized, the attitude of the noble clerics was not always sympathetic towards commoners. Their fictional works often explicitly exclude them. After having exclusively reserved all right of commentary upon the romance to the clerics and the knights, the prologue to the *Romance of Thebes* adds that it will deal with 'neither furriers, villeins, nor shepherds' (l. 16-17). In his *Romance of the Rose* (1209), Jean Renart is even more direct in the declaration of his intent, stating that he wishes to embellish his work with 'beautiful lines that no villein will be able to appreciate' (l. 14-15). The 'villeins'—who are at one and the same time farmers, commoners, and the poorly educated—were certainly not the envisaged readers of these two romances. They had no place among the courtly audience who read, or listened to, these works.

A fortiori, commoners were not accepted at court to govern with the prince. The romance that the clerk Alexandre de Paris (who may have

³⁷ Baldwin, *Paris*, 1200, 329.

been from Paris or from Bernay in Normandy) wrote around 1180 on the subject of Alexander the Great, the most powerful of emperors, claimed (similarly to the *Romance of Thebes*) that his work was written exclusively ‘for lords of high birth who govern the world’ (IV, l. 1631–1632). Further on, the romance suggests it is reserved for ‘noble knights, wise and good clerics, ladies and virgins of pale complexion’ (IV, l. 1651–1652), the latter words describing aristocratic ladies who, in obedience with the prevailing canons of beauty at that time, avoided the weather-worn complexion of the peasant women who worked in the fields. Similarly, the *Romance of Alexander the Great* describes the ‘astute advice’ that the future emperor receives from his master, Aristotle: ‘Never surround yourself with serfs of low extraction (*sers de put aire*), as many men have thus perished, exposed to the torment of calumny, murder or poison’ (I, l. 344–346). Wace, who was born into the nobility of the island of Jersey and who may have carried arms before becoming a cleric,³⁸ would appear to reaffirm this hierarchy in his *Roman de Rou*, a history of the dukes of Normandy that he was ordered to write in 1160 by the dukes’ successor, Henry II of England (1154–1189). All princes, he affirms, must respect the two higher categories of society, in accordance with the example of one of the forebears of the House of Normandy, the virtues of whom he extols: ‘Richard [I, 942–996] loved the clerics and “clergy”, the knights, and the institution of knighthood’ (III, l. 274–275). In passing, he also observes that ‘books are intended for the powerful who possess rents and money’ (III, l. 163–166). This assertion is certainly accurate from a material point of view as reflected by the wages of authors or translators, the cost of parchment, copying, and illustration. It is also mirrored in the regret expressed by the minstrel Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence fifteen or so years later, who curses those ‘writers’ who have stolen the first, and still incomplete, version of his *Life of Thomas Becket*, rendering it milder, shorter and full of untruths before selling it to ‘many wealthy men’ (l. 158). From a simple financial angle then, the identification of the material means necessary to order manuscripts confirms the elitism suggested in the prologue of the *Romance of Thebes*. In this way, the scholar and the knight were brought together by their shared contempt for the villeins.

The coming together of knight and cleric was therefore made possible by such overcoming of the distinction between *litteratus* and *illitteratus* or between *clericus* and *laicus* as these examples imply. From this period a hybrid figure, with characteristics of both orders, sometimes appears in

³⁸ Van Houts, *History and Family Traditions*, X; Bennet, ‘The Roman de Rou of Wace’, 37.

fictional literature, presumably corresponding to an ideal that many nobles would now wish to have attained. Lancelot, the most accomplished of the Knights of the Round Table, has a mastery of reading already in the first romance where he appears. In the *Knight of the Cart* (1177–1181) by Chrétien de Troyes, the knight himself reads one after another the names inscribed on the headstones of a cemetery (l. 1869–1870). In *Lancelot*, a long prose romance written in west central France around 1215–1225, he is even portrayed writing a parchment letter in his own hand, ‘because he was endowed with “knowledge” and because there was, in his time, no other knight as knowledgeable as he’ (t. 4, p. 346).³⁹ On the same basis the German writer Heinrich von dem Türlin maintained in *The Crown*, composed around 1230, that Lancelot was both knight (*Ritter*) and cleric (*Pfaffe*) (l. 2076). Heinrich adds that Lancelot also commented on the tales that he read out aloud to his comrades in arms. A model Christian soldier, Lancelot is described as having perfect mastery of reading and writing. He is, at one and the same time, both *miles* and *clericus*.

In reality, there were indeed examples of scholarly warriors, or there were at least examples of individuals considered as such by their contemporaries. Numerous eulogies of the training in Latin among the aristocracy of the kingdom of France have come down to us. The house of Anjou prided itself on being able to count among its forebears Foulque II le Bon (c. 940–c. 960), who is praised in the *Deeds of counts of Anjou*, which was written in the monastery of Marmoutier, near Tours, in the twelfth century. The *Deeds* repeats his well-known witticism against Louis IV d’Outremer (936–954), king of France, who scoffed at Foulque’s familiarity with priests: ‘An unlettered king is a donkey with a crown on his head!’ His detractors were thus obliged to admit to Foulque being ‘the lettered count and the brave knight’ that he showed himself to be: ‘He had perfect command of Latin and of the rules of grammar and he was able to apply the logic of Aristotle and Cicero with astuteness, and yet he was also among the best of the brave knights.’ The *Deeds* also adds that he himself composed a canticle of twelve verses to the glory of Saint Martin, whom he venerated by his frequent visits to the monastery of Marmoutier (pp. 140–141).

Around 1170, Jean, a monk in the same monastery, claimed to have revised the *Deeds*. A decade or so later he wrote his *History of Geoffrey* (count of Anjou 1129–1151), whom he considered to be ‘the greatest among princes by his military achievements, but also by his fortune and

³⁹ Girbea, *La Couronne ou l’auréole*, 479–485.

other works, having devoted himself to civilian arms and liberal studies' (p. 176). This biography describes the first conversation—which was spiritual and 'embellished with the colours of rhetoric'—between the young count and his future father-in-law and king of England, Henry I (1100–1135), whose nickname 'Beau Clerc' would appear to have been of some significance. He goes on to relate how the king dubs his son-in-law during a ceremony which is of such spiritual depth that it increases his knightly dignity (pp. 178–180). Finally, he tells how this 'lettered count' discovered a firebomb to conquer the castle of Montreuil-Bellay (Anjou) while reading a Latin strategy book by Vegetius (fifth century), yet aided in his translation by a monk of Marmoutier (p. 218). Even greater praise is to be found in a Latin poem from the same period written by Stephen of Rouen (d. c. 1170), a monk from the monastery of Le Bec, who was close to Empress Matilda of England (d. 1167), Geoffrey's widow. Stephen remembers him as 'another Mars as soon as he put on his helmet' (3, l. 7). If we are to believe Stephen, the letters of the deceased count matched his military talents: 'Cicero was inferior to him in prose, Virgil in verse, Socrates in logic and Achilles on horseback in the use of arms!' (l. 37–38). Here, the hyperbole expresses the highest praise for the knight who possesses the two supreme qualities of courage in battle and literary instruction.

Among the following generation, two other counts were showered with similar praise. Two long laudatory letters were written to Henry the Liberal of Champagne. The first letter, already mentioned above, was sent to him in 1152 by Nicolas de Montiéramey (d. 1175–1178), a lettered Cistercian monk who was protected by Henry after he had been expelled from Clairvaux by Saint Bernard. In this letter Henry is compared to the philosopher-king praised by Plato: 'You sit between the lettered and the equestrian orders, to the greater glory of both, magnificent and liberal towards the two' (ep. 56). The second epistle was written by Philip of Harvengt, who defended the *milites litterati* against the *idiotæ presbyteri*. This letter offers the most emphatic expression of praise: 'Oh you, noble knight and prince of knights, who have as much love and respect for the knights covered in their coats of mail as you have for the clerics and their letters!' This epistle also claims that Henry is a fine Latin scholar, who makes others look like 'donkeys eating thistles' (ep. 17). In addition, the aforementioned Philip of Harvengt sent a similar missive to Philip of Flanders (1157–1191), in which he described Philip as the most educated and accomplished offspring of a lineage in which *miles* and *clericus* were but one (ep. 16). As excessive as this may seem, such praise corresponds

to a definite penchant for letters on the part of the counts of Anjou, Champagne, and Flanders, which is also attested elsewhere.⁴⁰

The notable patronage of Geoffrey of Anjou, Henry of Champagne or Philip of Flanders should not prevent us from identifying the stereotypical elements in the eulogies of the chronicles and epistles written by clerics who are indebted to such patrons. More specifically, they tend to apply to them a discourse which is generally reserved for the 'scholar king',⁴¹ a very popular character among the intellectuals of the twelfth-century renaissance. The images and themes of their sycophantic praise stem, as might be expected, from Greek and Latin classics. They praise the union of 'strength' (*fortitudo*) and 'wisdom' (*sapientia*) that Homer and his imitators applied to the well-versed strategists of the Trojan Wars. Ulysses' cunning, Nestor's experience and the eloquence common to both heroes were of greater importance in the final victory of the Achaeans than the impetuous fury of the younger soldiers. Their wisdom did not prevent Ulysses and Nestor from being excellent combatants, quite the contrary.⁴² Mediated by stoicism, Christianity included these two qualities among the four cardinal virtues, with one difference, however, since 'wisdom' was transformed into 'prudence'. The celebrated *Etymologiae*, written by Isidore (d. 636), bishop of Seville, picks up these qualities in defining the epic, whose 'heroes' are named from the 'air', in other words from the heavens for which they have made themselves worthy through their wisdom and their strength (1.39.9).

In the twelfth century, the clerics, and especially those who were in the service of a prince, were obliged to return to this *topos*, even if merely to justify their role as advisers of the prince and as tutors of the prince's children.⁴³ In his *Two Books on Nature*, Alexander Neckam (1157–1217), foster-brother of Richard the Lionheart, insists on the benefits of culture for knights: 'What enemies in the kingdom could oppose those capable of triumphing over the sciences? What vile adversaries would not surrender to the profound intelligence of those who have traced hidden truths in the heart of nature itself?' (II, 174, p. 308). Gerald of Wales (1146–1223), another clerk whom Alexander Neckham must have met at the court of the king of England, gives preference to history over physics in the preface to

⁴⁰ Benton, 'The Court of Champagne as Literary Center'; Aurell, *L'Empire des Plantagenêt*, 106–113, and *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 280–282, 291–292.

⁴¹ For recent publications concerning an earlier period, see Rodríguez de la Peña, *Los Reyes Sabios*. For a later period, see Boudet, 'Le modèle du roi sage'.

⁴² Curtius, *La Littérature européenne*, 212–221.

⁴³ Buc, *L'Ambiguïté du livre*, 184–185.

his *Instruction of Princes* (1195–1217). Gerald writes of the past: ‘The more lettered and scholarly the princes were, the better they kept themselves informed of the affairs of war and the braver they showed themselves to be: like Alexander, the brilliant leader of the Macedonians, like Julius Caesar, for the Romans, or like his nephew Augustus’—after which he immediately praises the prince of the kingdom who brings together ‘arms and the gown, the art of war as well as letters’ (p. 7). If these authors are to be believed, culture provides the warrior class with knowledge of nature and of men, both of which are essential for victory. It is implicitly suggested that strategy, but also a certain degree of cunning, is something which can be learnt from books. It was certainly cunning that the chronicler Gaufrédo Malaterra, writing around 1100, associates with the literary education which allowed his Norman forebears to conquer Sicily: ‘They are a very shrewd people [...], capable of imitating anything [...], who through the study of eloquence know how to adulate, to such an extent that already their boys seem to be orators’ (I, 3).

The value attributed to the union of ‘clergy’ and knighthood corresponds to another very popular idea among twelfth-century intellectuals, that of the ‘Translation of empire and study’ (*Translatio imperii et studii*). History had taught them that military power and written knowledge were born in the East and that they progressively moved westwards, thereby conferring on Western Europe superiority over all other civilizations. The translation of empire appeared for the first time in the writings of Augustine of Hippo (354–430), followed by the translation of study in the writings of Rabanus Maurus (780–856). Around 1150, bishop Otto of Freising (d. 1158), uncle and adviser to the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick I Barbarossa (1152–1190), wrote that ‘power and wisdom’ have emigrated to the Franks who settled around the Rhine. Thirty or so years later, in the prologue to his romance *Cligès* (1176–1180), Chrétien de Troyes who was fascinated by the military exploits of King Arthur (and probably also of Henry II of England) placed chivalry in England and ‘clergy’ in France. This separation may remind us of another romance, *Athis et Procelias* (c. 1170) by Alexandre de Paris, who places ‘clergy’ in Athens, and chivalry further west in Rome (l. 86–87). But that was ancient history; and around 1200 Alexander Neckham and Gerald of Wales explain that both were to be found in France, after having travelled through Egypt, Greece and Rome. Nostalgia for their student days in Paris may partly explain their belief in French cultural superiority.⁴⁴ The same sense of French

⁴⁴ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 267–268, 583–584.

cultural superiority is to be found in the *Deeds of Saint Louis*, written by Guillaume de Nangis (d. 1300), a monk of Saint-Denis, a necropolis and memorial place where the kings of France placed objects from their coronation ceremonies and their banners of war. Guillaume goes on to add that knowledge and chivalry were brought together with the Christian faith to Paris from Greece. The kings of France therefore adopted the lily in their ensign, for its three petals symbolized *fides*, *sapientia* and *militia*, with the first petal (*fides*, 'faith') sitting higher than the two supporting petals (*sapientia*, 'wisdom', and *militia*, 'chivalry') (p. 320). This is, of course, a patent example of the use of a well-known commonplace for political propaganda.

The ideological element in any medieval development of the themes of *fortitudo* and *sapientia*, or of *Translatio imperii et studii*, provides a clear example of the difficulties the historian is faced with when attempting to estimate the 'literacy' of the laity on the basis of stereotyped eulogies from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Adding to this complexity is the phenomenon of intertextuality, which modern criticism defines as mutual borrowing between various works, but also that of the influence of classical rhetoric on the clerics of that period. Nevertheless, these various obstacles to understanding may sometimes be overcome by cross-referencing and comparing different sources. Such comparison reveals beyond any doubt that there were indeed an appreciable number of nobles with a mastery of Latin. In his *Chronica Majora*, Matthew Paris provides an elegy for one of Henry III's principal royal officers and advisers, Paulin Piper, who died in 1251, and who was, he writes, in praise of his excellent mastery of Latin, 'a literate knight, or a military cleric' (*miles litteratus sive clericus militaris*, t. 5, p. 242). If more proof were required, further on in the same passage his secular status is underscored by mention of his greedy acquisition of land and royal income to build luxurious manor houses, and further on still by mention of his wife who remarried shortly after his death. Elsewhere, Matthew Paris claims that Paulin Piper had solemnly undertaken in 1250 to join the Crusade with other English knights (t. 5, p. 101). And at the same time, the table of contents of a partially preserved manuscript mentions 'a written rhyme on Saint George by Paulin Piper.'⁴⁵ Unfortunately the corresponding folios for this hagiographical poem evoking the martyr warrior have been lost. The reference would nevertheless seem to corroborate the exceptional literary ability, most probably expressed in Latin, of its author.

⁴⁵ Cambridge University Library, ms Dd. ii. 78, quoted by Russell, *Dictionary of Writers*, 94.

There are fewer examples attesting to the spoken and written use of the language of Cicero by the laity than there are for knights writing songs and romances in the vernacular. This is the case with the majority of Occitan poets, for example. Indeed, slightly more than half of the hundred or so known troubadours belonged to the lay nobility, as against less than one tenth who belonged to the clergy.⁴⁶ From the fourteenth century onwards, some of these writers even praise their mother tongue, which they consider if not superior, then at least closer and more intimate than Latin. Between 1304 and 1309, in *Il Convivio* ('The Banquet'), Dante Alighieri (1265–1321) insists upon his 'perfect love' of Italian with which he says he is united in spirit much more than with any other language. His esteem for Italian is increased by the fact that it is the language spoken by his parents and fellow citizens, and he decides to write *Il Convivio* in Italian rather than Latin because the latter is only understood by a small number of men of letters (I, 9, 11–12).

In his *Divine Comedy* (1306–1321), Dante places Francesca da Rimini in hell for succumbing to a passionate love for her brother-in-law while the two are reading together a romance describing Lancelot and Guinevere's first kiss. Her husband surprises them in the act and kills them on the spot (V, l. 127–138). The mirror effect or 'mise en abyme' through which Dante mimetically transposes in his own text the fictional embrace of Lancelot and Guinevere is striking. He tells also this story to teach a moral lesson on adultery and incest. But beyond rhetoric and ethics, the fictional character of a feminine and amorous reader contains a sociological reality of interest to the historian. For at least three decades now, the study of the erudite culture of Francesca's medieval female counterparts has given rise to a certain enthusiasm in the British Isles and North America. This interest may be explained by the Anglo-American advance not only in the field of 'literacy' studies but also in gender studies which analyse the role and action of women in society. This led to an overview published by Dennis H. Green in 2007 and entitled *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*. This study of women readers is paralleled by numerous books published in English on female authorship, and most notably Peter Dronke's *Women Writers of the Middle Ages* (1984). These women appear above all in a monastic context. Mention will be made here only of Heloise, the unfortunate wife of Peter Abelard and later abbess of the Paraclete, whose life is detailed in an excellent biography by Guy Lobrichon published in 2005. Other cloistered nuns are praised for their calligraphic skills

⁴⁶ Menegaldo, *Le Jongleur*, 144–147, Laurent, *Prosopographie des troubadours*.

and for the quality of their Latin which they demonstrate modestly in the course of copying books. Recent research inspired by gender studies further emphasizes the importance of the literary patronage of ladies of the lay aristocracy in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries; for it is, indeed, often in their bedrooms that many of the books are interpreted or read. This raises the question of whether they were more interested in literature than their husbands, and whether they read more than them. The iconographic stereotypes certainly tend to represent noble women with their book of hours in their hands. But the issue of the respective roles of the two sexes in 'literacy' is sufficiently complex to warrant further exploration.

One of the objectives of this book is to provide a historical sociology of knowledge in the knightly milieu of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. For the same period, some historians have adopted a similar method in the field of scholasticism. Thanks to expert studies published by Jacques Le Goff, Jacques Verger and Alain Boureau, we are familiar with those whom they describe respectively as 'the intellectuals, professional men who rubbed shoulders with craftsmen and tradesmen on urban work sites', 'men of learning' and members of 'an intellectual community which was also a social body'. We are also familiar with the kinship background of such persons, the extent of their education, the programs and the organization of their teaching, their relations with the episcopacy, kingship, and other forms of power, and also their mentality.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the educated nobility certainly differed from the clerics whose identity depended largely on their knowledge, but a similar line of inquiry can be pursued about them and their characteristics. Were there many literate knights? What proportion did they represent amongst the aristocracy?⁴⁷ What was the extent of their literacy? Did they simply know how to read (writing being at that time a highly technical activity)? To what extent did they have mastery of Latin? Was their knowledge limited simply to memorizing prayers or were they able to understand in detail a range of texts in Latin? Did they dictate their literary works or did they write them down themselves? What is the part of their classical or literary culture and the part of their own imagination in their writings? Were they inspired by their own direct personal reading, by conversations with clerics or by jugglers performances? Was their knowledge valued and recognized within their own order, which was defined principally by its aptitude to waging war?

⁴⁷ This question is explicitly raised in the title of an article by R. V. Turner: 'The *Miles Literatus* in Twelfth- and Thirteenth-Century England: How Rare a Phenomenon?'

COURTESY AND THE CIVILIZATION OF MORES

Knowledge and ‘courtesy’ are inextricably linked during the Middle Ages. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, the Norman monk Orderic Vitalis (1075–1142) associates them when praising Mathilda of Flanders (d. 1083), wife of William the Conqueror. Indeed he grants her with ‘the science of letters and all the beauty of manners and virtues’ (t. 2, p. 224). At a lower social level of the aristocracy, the Lombard Acerbo Morena, who co-wrote his *History of Frederick Barbarossa* with his father Ottone around 1164, again brought together not only literary and courtly qualities but also military virtues in his appreciative description of Conrad of Ballhausen, ‘the most powerful adviser’ of the Emperor: ‘Lettered and scholarly, gentle and affable, wise and courageous in war, learned in German and Italian’ (p. 170).

The graciousness of manners and refinement of conversation already remarked upon in Mathilda of Flanders and Conrad of Ballhausen are described by the words *curialitas*, *corteisie*, *cortesia* or *hövescheit*, but *urbanitas* or *civilitas* and their vernacular derivations are also frequently found in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Latin and vernacular literature. Their antonyms were *rusticitas* or *villenie*, which stigmatised the alleged brutishness and lack of education of rural people and country serfs. In his Latin treatise *De vulgari eloquentia* (‘On the Eloquence of the Vernacular’, 1303–1305), Dante defines courtesy (*curialitas*) as the ‘rule of balancing in what must be accomplished’, and places it at the royal palace (I, XVIII, 4). This interpretation of the term underlines the level-headed, moderate nature of codes of behaviour expected at the court of a powerful ruler, a place where men and women of the aristocracy and the clergy would commonly meet. ‘Court’ comes from the classical Latin *cohors* or *cors*, which designates *inter alia* an enclosure for raising livestock, the sixth part of a legion, or a magistrate’s personal guard. During the high Middle Ages, the word *curtis* developed from *cohors* to signify a rural estate, and in turn (at a time when Romance languages had greater influence) the term shifted towards the meaning of *curia* (the ‘assembly of the Senate’ in Rome), the place where royal, princely, or aristocratic power, and those who exercised that power, were to be found. The semantic field of the word ‘court’ therefore covers the palace where the holder of authority lives and works, but also the advisers who help the holder of authority to govern. In order to work in bureaucracy, the literary education is appreciated for king’s advisers. We must thus add the nuance of ‘science’ and ‘learn-

ing' to their courtesy.⁴⁸ Nonetheless, 'courtesy' designates mainly the norms of behaviour which provide the entourage of the ruler with those upper manners which confirm the right to command others. 'Urbanity' and 'civility' stood in contrast to their antonym 'rusticity' to indicate the superiority of the urban mode of life over the rural. It was at court and in town that this distinction resided.

The adoption of codes of behaviour in social life required self-control. Courtesy demanded of the individual, however sociable, a questioning of his or her conscience and a striving for personal improvement. It thereby regulated the behaviour of each individual in order to promote moderation and the control of personal desire. More specifically, it increased the moral importance of amorous passion. It applied equally to women and men and should therefore not be confused with chivalry, which was a specifically male ethic of combat. The progressive integration of courtly values for the individual never lost its collective implication, since it provided a means of regulating tensions in the closed and densely occupied milieu of the court. Even if in theory the body should become the mirror of the soul, and bodily movements should come to reflect inner morals, in practice the courtier acted too often exclusively in order to please others. The exploring gaze and judgment of people surrounding him met this exterior façade, visible in physical presence and dress. Likewise, all persons were appreciated or rejected by their manner of speech, which had to be that of the cultured man, whose sophisticated education was common to other people of the same rank.

Medieval courtesy was rooted in the ancient ideal of the virtuous citizen serving the interest of the State. In his person, honesty (*honestum*) and efficiency (*utile*) came together to the advantage of society, in accordance with the pattern set out in Cicero's *De Officiis* ('On Duty') (44 BC), which medieval writers learnt of through the work of the same title by Bishop Ambrose of Milan (d. 397). According to this classic, these two qualities were the attributes of the learned orator (*doctus orator*), the expert who had mastery of rhetoric. The same cult of wisdom at the service of the common good is to be found in the writings of Seneca (d. 65) and other Stoics. It should be emphasised that the intellectuals of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries held these two authors in the highest esteem. In his *Entheticus*, John of Salisbury claims that 'the world has known nothing grander than Cicero (l. 1215)'. His contemporary Godfrey of Saint Victor, a Parisian master, writes that by their moral superiority the letters

⁴⁸ Roncaglia, 'Le corti medievale', 34–35.

of Seneca to Lucilius ‘must be placed just after Gospel’ (v. 412). A century later, the Franciscan friar and Oxford professor Roger Bacon (1214–1294) expressed similar admiration for the Stoic philosopher. In the *Opus tertium* (1270), he says that his respect for the pagan Seneca is even greater because the Roman discovered his morals ‘without the light of faith and with reason as his sole guide’ (§75). He goes as far as to suggest that Seneca, alongside Aristotle and Cicero, possessed a natural sense of ethics superior to the Christian morals ‘of us who are in the depths of vice, from whence only divine grace may save us’ (§14). The twelfth-century Renaissance involves a return to the Stoics and their concept of ethics.

Like chivalry, courtesy must be understood both in the short term and in the long term, synchronically and diachronically. It corresponds, on the one hand, to a form of behaviour advocated by the governing elites of centralized and bureaucratic states everywhere in the world since antiquity. But, on the other hand, it can also be considered as a value system which was more prevalent during certain periods. Recent specialists in the field have tended to prefer the former interpretation. Their literary rather than historical training encourages them to see a continuity in the notion of courtesy as conveyed by writings over the course of a thousand years. The Swiss philologist Reto Bezzola (1898–1983) published an impressive number of volumes between 1944 and 1963 on the origins and formation of courtly literature in the West from the sixth to the twelfth centuries. In his works he takes just such a chronologically extended approach. The mass of texts which he analyses may perhaps detract from the coherence of his work, but nonetheless they have provided a rich documentary source for all subsequent researchers.

Three important books on the topic appeared at the end of the 1980s, as if the turning away from social conventions in favour of spontaneity which developed after May 1968 suddenly awakened an interest in the medieval origins of those conventions. In 1985, the American scholar C. Stephen Jaeger, a specialist of German literature, published his first work on the influence of courtly ideals on aristocratic behaviour, a theme which he has returned to repeatedly in his subsequent research. Jaeger considers the ancient model of the Roman statesman to be central to the teachings of the cathedral schools in the early Middle Ages. This ideal, embodied by several humanist bishops who also fulfilled administrative roles, would seem to have spread throughout the West from the court of the Holy Roman Emperor Otto I the Great (936–973). Published in 1986, *Courtly Culture* by the German scholar Joachim Bumke describes ‘the festive society of the court’ from a social, material, and mental point of view, dealing

more specifically with the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Most of his information stems from fiction literary texts, since he holds that 'its tendency towards idealization is not incompatible with realistic detail'. Contrary to Jaeger, Bumke is convinced that the courtly literature of this period is of French origin. The same view is held by Aldo Scaglione, Professor of Italian literature at New York University, who nevertheless lays greater stress on the influence of the troubadours. As the title of his book *Knights at Court* (1991) indicates, Scaglione closely associates chivalry and courtesy, concepts which he studies in parallel from the Carolingian Empire up to the period of modern Absolutism. In his view, by accepting warriors as an order from around AD 1000, the Church was seeking to encourage them to adopt manners and courtly love in order to turn them away from violence. In short, the three books mentioned above approach courtesy as a cultural model rather than as a social, human reality.

Norbert Elias' *The Civilizing Process* was published in 1939 in Nazi Germany, understandably under difficult circumstances for the Jewish sociologist. This shrewd essay attracted little attention from historians until the 1980s when they began to adopt it with enthusiasm. He argues that the aristocracy in Europe learnt to master their impulses and to civilize their manners around the king who was motivated to compel them towards the exercise of self-control in order to curb their impulses to revolt. With all spontaneity banned, the courtiers in effect created social masks behind which they succeeded in hiding their feelings, in the process inventing self-awareness and personal interiority. Gripped by the fear of conspiracy, denunciation, and disgrace, they learnt to adopt these new rules of behaviour and thought in the claustrophobic milieu of the court. These attitudes were subsequently disseminated by them among the other social orders. This process of dissimulation, which was characteristic of absolutist monarchy, was unknown in the Middle Ages. For Elias, it starts only in Early Modern Europe.

Not surprisingly, the notion of the late invention of the civilizing process has provoked reaction from medievalists. The latter have unearthed numerous texts which provide evidence of earlier resonance for this phenomenon. Moreover, Jaeger has questioned the idea that this process of refinement was a specifically Western phenomenon, suggesting that similar processes are to be found in China, Japan, and Arabia. In a somewhat more positive vein than Elias, he suggests that this process was the result of education rather than princely coercion. During antiquity and the Middle Ages, education was intended to form rather than to inform, with a charismatic master providing a model of behaviour to be followed by his

pupil. An older pedagogical system therefore preceded the civilizing process. It in fact gave the impetus to this process and is by no means subjected to it. Hence, what Elias sees as the consequence of social change, Jaeger sees rather as the cause.⁴⁹ This criticism would appear to be well founded, but it needs to be completed by the taking into account of Christian values by the medieval educators who did not limit themselves only to reproducing the stoic ideal of the honest and upright rhetorician in their lives and in their teaching, as C. S. Jaeger tends to suggest.⁵⁰ As clerics, their objective was to transmit to their pupils an evangelical view of the world and of ethics. Classical and ancient humanism has thus been incorporated by their Christianity.

The education and courtesy of the twelfth- and thirteenth-century knights are the main focus of this book. The sources available are numerous and wide ranging: from charter to clerical epistle, from troubadour song to Arthurian romance, and even illuminated manuscripts. From these sources, it is possible to define the nature and extent of the erudite culture of the aristocracy (who constitute, in fact, the only secular group for whom such a study would appear feasible). The education of noble boys and girls whose parents did not intend them for a clerical career will be in the subject of the first chapter. During a period in which books were rare objects, literature and scientific knowledge were necessarily transmitted orally. This gave rise to the development of a noble sociability at court, which is the subject of second chapter. The generosity of kings, princes, and lords allowed authors to be brought together with the interpreters of their writings and with the scribes who copied their works. The literary skills of the courtiers contributed to the development of princely administration but also to the production of propaganda favourable to their patrons. But princely patronage can on occasion represent no more than a disinterested concern for belles-lettres. This line of inquiry leads in the third chapter to an examination of the concept of courtesy and the civilizing process. For book-based knowledge did indeed have an impact on the behaviour of the knights. It refined the manners of warriors and, more profoundly, modified their conduct, especially when they were in contact with ladies and with the clergy.

⁴⁹ Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*, 8–9.

⁵⁰ Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 24–25, 88–89, 93–94, Vincent, ‘The Court of Henry II’, 328, n. 2.

Knighthood and Literacy

Several texts have already been mentioned which reveal that knighthood and ‘clergy’ (*clergie*, with the double meaning of ‘clerics’ and ‘knowledge’) were by no means incompatible. Most of these texts were in praise of educated princes. Other sources present the opinions of intellectuals regarding the degree of education that warriors should possess. At the lower end of the scale a handful of these texts recommend a level of literacy not exceeding what proposes the popular *Epitoma rei militaris* (also referred to as *De Re Militari*) by Vegetius. The Roman writer considered it sufficient for a handful of soldiers in an army to know how to write and count in order to be able to organize guard duty, military leave, and the procurement of supplies (II, 18). Vegetius’ book was frequently read and analysed during the Middle Ages. In 1284, Jean de Meung, a Parisian cleric, translated the entire work into French, with the *miles* (or Roman soldier) becoming a ‘knight’ (XIX) in keeping with the common practice of the time. He nevertheless restricts himself to a faithful reproduction of Vegetius’ argument. Indeed, this minimalist recommendations, while suited to the professional army of the Roman Empire, is hardly relevant to medieval chivalry. Stephen, abbot of Limburg an der Hardt (the Palatinate) and author of *Life of Saint Eckenbert* (beginning of the twelfth century), is one of a number of writers who considered that ‘the mastery of letters is of no detriment to the future knight, even if it is of greater advantage to those who leave worldly existence’ (p. 130). Finally, a more demanding standard is set by the discourse in *Disciplina Clericalis* by Peter Alfonsi (c. 1062–c.1140), a Jewish convert and physician of Alfonso I of Aragon (1104–1134), who was also godfather at his baptism. This work reports the last words of advice given by a father to his son in the form of a series of fables of Arabic or Persian inspiration. It presents the three categories of knowledge which must be mastered by anyone who aspires to true nobility. According to this advice, the perfect knight must spend as much time familiarizing himself with the seven liberal arts of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* as he does practicing the seven skills of war (horseriding, swimming, archery, wrestling, falconry, chess, and poetry) while avoiding the seven vices (gluttony, drunkenness, lust, wrath, untruthfulness, avarice, and gossip) (IV). In point of fact, the level of education required of the nobility by the authors of the texts shows a huge range of variation, depending on the author.

Beyond these declarations of principle, what then was the actual extent of book-based learning among the secular aristocracy? Despite their limitations, the sources provide some indication. In their correspondence, in their historiography to the glory of their patrons and their patrons’ fami-

lies, and in the dedications of their treatises or accounts, a number of ecclesiastical writers praise the extraordinary erudition of their secular benefactors. In their writings, their tributes most certainly exaggerate the reality. The rhetoric of these fawning declarations basically compromises any attempt to answer the question. *A contrario*, the hagiographical texts praising the intellectual precociousness and tremendous culture of some holy monk or bishop, while at the same time praising his pacifism, generally demonstrate disdain for the violence of the knights, who are described as uneducated and coarse.

The evidence of charters, which were sometimes signed by laymen, is also problematic, for it would be naive to take such signatures as irrefutable proof of their literacy. The inadequacy of the evidence must be recognized: to extrapolate quantitative data for such an early period is simply impossible. The available documents are nevertheless of interest, provided that we accept that it is essential to read between the lines in order to apprehend their ideological and propaganda content. Similarly, the weight of literary tradition and classical references was an important influence on the way these documents were formulated. The documentation is more the reflection of a clerical ideal of the 'literacy' of the nobility than an accurate reflection of their actual knowledge. And yet through this distorting prism we may nevertheless collect some precious indications of their education and knowledge.

SCHOOLING AND TEACHING CHILDREN TO READ AND WRITE

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, military activities required early and intensive training. Since around 1050, cavalry provided a significant advantage on the battlefield. Fixing a lance to their right arm, knights took advantage of the force of their galloping horse to unseat their enemies, while using their left arm to protect themselves with a shield. If they fell to the ground they would use their sword to strike. This type of fighting required horsemanship and physical strength, skills which could only be acquired through a long apprenticeship and continual training. As soon as young boys could walk, they would be put on a rocking horse and not long afterwards on a real horse. They learnt the art of fencing beginning with wooden swords and shields. Once past his childhood, the boy would leave his mother and nurses to learn the art of battle, often far from the family castle, along with other boys of similar age, the *juvenes* or *bachelers*. They would serve as knights' squires, looking after their palfreys and weapons. They would also train for hours at a time and take part in hunts. They would practise falconry and archery. They would play chess, which was intended to initiate them into military strategy. They would relax at evening gatherings during which they would hear stories of battle, *chansons de geste*, and love poems. Rarely staying in one place, they would travel around in groups with other young men of the same age, surviving through pillage and plundering, participating in tournaments and fighting for whoever paid the highest. Basically, they hardly had the time or the motivation to study Latin.

Despite the difficulty of obtaining scholarly education, there was clearly an increased prestige during the twelfth century attached to knights with an education in letters. One of the indicators of this new tendency would seem to be the appearance of Alexander the Great among the pantheon of the knights' epic heroes, alongside the more traditional figures of Charlemagne, Roland, William of Gellone, and Arthur. This trend is clear in the numerous romances about Alexander which were written in the vernacular in different parts of Europe. Clerical adaptations of the various Latin versions of the *Alexander Romance* (originally from a Greek text wrongly attributed to Callisthenes of Olynthus, a companion of Alexander) were specifically intended for a knightly readership. Around 1180, in the prologue to his Alexander romance written in dodecasyllables (a poetic metre which came to be named the 'alexandrine' after its author), Alexandre de Paris insists that his poem is intended for non-clerical readers: 'I want to present the history of Alexander in French verse (*romans*),

that it might be enjoyed by the laity' (l. 30–31). The content of this book also argues in favour of a knightly, rather than a clerical, readership. Indeed, it seems that the historical Alexander liked to surround himself with young warriors of noble extraction as the hero conquered fame and fortune, while rejecting companions of more lowly condition.¹ And yet, almost all the Alexander romances insist, to a greater or lesser extent, on the attentive education that Alexander receives from Aristotle, the most scholarly of masters.² They relate how throughout his whole life the great conqueror maintained a constant interest in experimental sciences which pushed him to attempt to explore the air and the seas with the help of various flying or aquatic contraptions.

At the very beginning of the twelfth century, in his *Praise of Alexander*, Albéric de Pisançon states that the private tutors chosen by Philip II of Macedon inculcated his son with solid moral principles, whilst also teaching him languages (Greek, Latin, Hebrew, and Armenian), how to write on parchment, how to play the wheel fiddle and the lyre, how to tune stringed instruments, and how to sing, as well as having him familiarize himself with military affairs, law, and natural sciences (l. 81–105). Half a century or so later, this list remains practically unchanged for Alexander of Paris, except that he replaces Armenian with Chaldean, adding astronomy and rhetoric and removing music (I, l. 333–342). Things are quite different, however, in the German *Alexanderroman*, written by Rudolf von Ems (d. 1254) around 1240. The latter lays particular stress on young Alexander's learning how to sing (l. 1364–1368). While the partially preserved *Praise of Alexander* does not explicitly quote Aristotle, and the *Alexanderroman* merely includes Aristotle among six other teachers of the young Alexander (an assertion which accords with pseudo-Callisthenes), Alexander of Paris's *Roman* presents Aristotle as the young boy's sole tutor. So too does Walter of Châtillon in his *Alexandreis* (1182), a long Latin saga whose poetical qualities gave it a wide diffusion. It must, however, be underlined that Walter's poem does not actually provide any information regarding the content of Aristotle's teaching, since it tends to follow the more austere model of Quintus Curtius Rufus rather than the romantic version of pseudo-Callisthenes. According to the *Alexandreis*, Aristotle was more of a moral and political adviser than a teacher (l. 42, 82–183). The close relationship between Aristotle and Alexander is also reflected in the *Secret of secrets*, a book originally composed in Arabic

¹ Gosman, 'Le Roman d'Alexandre et les juvenes'.

² Gaullier-Bougassas, 'Alexander and Aristotle'; Kelly, 'Alexander's Clergie'.

which is at one and the same time a mirror for princes (a sort of manual describing the rules of good government) and a scientific encyclopaedia. Translated into Latin in Toledo around 1130–1150, the *Secret of secrets* became remarkably popular, being subsequently translated into most vernacular Western languages. The *Secret of secrets* presents itself as being the letter that Aristotle sent to his pupil Alexander when the latter was preparing to invade the Persian Empire.

The *Libro de Alexandre* also claims that Philip entrusted his seven years old son Alexander to Aristotle. The anonymous author who wrote the *Libro* in Castilian around 1200 is proud of his status and knowledge: ‘I carry on a fine profession which is related to the ‘clergy’ and which is totally different from juggling since it is without sin’ (§2). He accordingly describes himself as a ‘cleric from the schools’ (§95) and he even provides a list of towns like Paris, ‘which possess an abundance of all “clergy”’ (§2582), or like Bologna, ‘a source of laws and decrees’ (§2583), which shine through the reputation of their teaching. He presents the subjects which Aristotle taught the young prince within the framework of the seven liberal arts, except that medicine and physics replace arithmetic and geometry (§38–44). It is claimed that Alexander manifests his gratitude towards Aristotle accordingly: ‘Master, it was you who brought me up; thanks to you I know “clergy”’ (§38), while Aristotle is supposed to have returned the compliment by praising Alexander as a *miles litteratus*: ‘You possess a great “clergy” (*clerezia*) [...] and since your childhood you have shown yourself to be of great knighthood (*cavalleria*)’ (§52). Thus the greatest conqueror in history appropriates the scholarly learning of the most erudite of all clerics. Even if it is applied to an emperor, the model not only befits ‘scholarly kings’ and territorial princes who, in the twelfth- and thirteenth-centuries, increase their bureaucratic power. Most nobles would appear then to have sought to provide a literary education for their sons. Others, however, even though probably less numerous, were still wary of such an education for fear that it might jeopardize the training of their sons as warriors.

Sons faced with choosing the calling of taking up arms or of the cloister

Hagiographical texts sometimes describe the opposition between a future abbot or bishop, always of noble background, and other young men of the same age who are less inclined to spiritual matters. An example is the *Life*

of *Saint Hugh of Semur* (1024–1109), the reformist abbot of Cluny, written around 1120 by Hildebert of Lavardin (1055–1133), bishop of Le Mans, who had known Hugh personally. A brilliant Latin scholar, Hildebert gives a thorough description of the obstacles that his friend had to overcome in order to obtain an education. Born to a baronial Burgundian family, Hugh was certainly able to count on the support of his mother, a deeply pious woman, who gave her son up to God at birth that he might one day become a priest. ‘However’, writes Hildebert, ‘desirous of a transitory inheritance’, Hugh’s father had other plans. ‘He encouraged him to ride with other youngsters of the same age, to train his charger, to learn how to handle the lance and how to protect himself with a shield, and, something that Hughes hated above all else, to take part in their pillage and plundering’ (I, 1). Eventually, another Hugh, bishop of Auxerre and the younger Hugh’s great uncle, managed to obtain his father’s permission for him to learn ‘grammar, in Chalon-sur Saône, which would allow him to reach the elevation of Holy Scripture.’ The young man took advantage of being far from the family castle to disobey his father and enter the monastery of Cluny (I, 2).

It is very rare for ecclesiastical writers to prefer the young man in military training to a brother promised to the clergy and yet this was the case with the anonymous author, perhaps a monk from the monastery of Saint-Gilles du Gard, who wrote the *The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles* between 1112 and 1118. Wholly won over to the cause of Bolesław III Wrymouth (1102–1138), duke of Poland, he admired how ‘instead of wasting time with stupid games, the latter imitated as best he could, for a child, valiant military accomplishments [...], being particularly interested in knighthood’ (II, 9). This ‘child of Mars’ couldn’t wait to kill his first wild boar and his first bear, to go to war with grown men, and to receive his dubbing’ (II, 11–13, 18). He was thus very different from his half brother Zbigniew, ‘born of a concubine, placed in learning in the city of Krakow, and sent by his stepmother to round off his learning in a monastery of nuns in Saxony’ (II, 4). If the *Deeds* recognizes his qualities as an orator—‘older and more literate than his brother, he knew how to embellish his words with rhetoric’ (II, 16)—it despises his cowardice in battle which produced mockery from the crowd: ‘they said that since he was a cleric, he should govern the Church’ (II, 17). Not being able to accept a dukedom sharing power with Bolesław III, he betrayed his brother and ended up fighting him with the help of hereditary enemies of the Polish.

In this anonymous text, the fratricidal struggle is paralleled by an opposition between military values and clerical culture which turns in favour

of the former: 'The kings and princes of this world are elevated by their triumphant wars and victories' (III, prologue). And yet the tenor of the text, written first and foremost to extol Bolesław III, is misleading. The author is particularly hostile towards Zbigniew because the latter's birth outside wedlock disqualified him from inheriting the dukedom. By obtaining an education for him, his family were in fact destining him for a career as a bishop, as was still the common practice for the illegitimate children of princely families. His literary studies prevented him from preparing himself for knightly status and it thus came about quite unexpectedly that his father involved him in the government of the principality. The anonymous writer has even more reason to be opposed to Zbigniew as he is a fervent partisan of Bolesław III and his exclusive power. In the end, the warrior knight won the struggle against the cleric whom he accused of treason in 1112. He had Zbigniew's eyes put out, which was followed by the latter's death shortly afterwards.

The same antagonism between soldiering and studying is present, although admittedly at a less virulent level, in the *Autobiography* written between 1208 and 1216 by the archdeacon Gerald of Wales (1146–1223), who was born into a noble Norman family in South Wales. He describes playing in the sand as a child with his four brothers, all older than him. His brothers would build sandcastles while he built churches and monasteries. This was why, Gerald writes in his autobiography, his father affectionately called him 'my bishop' and decided that he should study letters. One evening there was an enemy attack and all the young men in the castle took up arms except Gerald who asked to be taken to the church, 'declaring with admirable foresight that the peace of the church and immunity of the house of God are the surest and safest'. After his early years, however, Gerald sometimes found his studies difficult, since he preferred training with his brothers in order to become a knight. His uncle David Fitz Gerald (d. 1176), bishop of Saint David's, along with two clerics in Gerald's family entourage, rekindled his liking for letters to such an extent that he eventually left for Paris to study the liberal arts (I, 1–2).

In the description he gives of his vague childhood memories, Gerald writes that as the youngest brother he was (contrary to what we know about Hugh of Cluny but similarly to Zbigniew) destined by his noble lineage to enter the priesthood. During his teenage years, he was nonetheless still attracted by the excitement of knighthood and this was detrimental to his learning of Latin. However, the young Gerald kept his inner vacillation between arms and letters strictly to himself. His autobiography—or, to be more exact, his confession, in the manner of Saint Augustine of

Hippo (354–430)—emphasizes his gradual conversion which, assisted by the clergymen in his family, eventually convinced him to renounce the world and all the pomp and vanity of knighthood, which represented quite the opposite to the peaceful shelter of the church where he had, once in childhood, found refuge during a night of violence. The call of the priesthood and his appetite for study got the upper hand over the attraction of arms in his own personal struggle (of an interior and ascetic nature), which once again reflects the dialectic—we might no longer go as far as to say antagonism—between ‘clergy’ and knighthood.

The first teachers: family, private tutors, and courtly clerics

A boy born into an aristocratic family might learn the rudiments of reading and writing in the manor of his parents before leaving for a castle where he would join a troop of teenagers in order to perfect his military skills under the authority of a competent instructor. Such was the case of Caradué, the presumed son of the king of Vannes, as recounted in the *First Continuation of Perceval* (1191–1204): ‘At the age of four, the king made him learn Latin. As soon as he could read and understand Latin, he sent him to his uncle [King Arthur]’ (l. 2110–2113). In this instance, the fictional representation does correspond to a certain reality, since contemporary charters and chronicles often allude to young nobles being educated in the houses of their maternal uncles with whom they maintained a close emotional as well as feudal relationship. This avuncular connection corresponds to the ‘hypergamic’ matrimonial strategies through which the knight would marry a woman of superior condition to his own, sometimes indeed the daughter of his lord. Power and wealth, but also vassal superiority, were therefore to be found in the maternal line. This was the reason why many young men were brought up in the castle belonging to one of their maternal uncles or another of their mothers’ relatives.

Occasionally, the father would personally dispense basic Latin instruction or, at least, take a close interest in the boy’s teaching. Peter Abelard, for instance, describes in *The History of my Calamities*, how his father who had ‘acquainted himself somewhat with literature before receiving the knight’s baldric’ wanted to provide his children with a similar education before they learned to bear arms. He also adds: ‘He paid even more attention to my education since I was his dear eldest boy’. Peter Abelard’s father was a country squire residing outside the town of Nantes but his involvement in what are evidently the initial stages of his children’s ac-

quisition of literacy would, however, appear to be the exception rather than the rule amongst the aristocracy. Abelard's father may perhaps have espoused the idea, inherited by his son, of the intellectual career as a dogged combat against other masters, in which the latter were to be crushed through scholastic debate in order to be able to take over their pupils. 'Choosing the weapons of dialectics and reason, I preferred attacking through disputation to battle trophies' (ep. I, 1b), Abelard admits when justifying his vocation. The warlike metaphors which he is so fond of were certainly strongly influenced by his education. He was not the only one, however, since the schools of Paris were compared at that time to a 'fortress', the library of a monastery being described as its 'arsenal'.³ Far from dissociating clergy and knighthood, the literary rhetoric of the time does not reject warlike imagery in regard to the former.

Fathers would not appear to have played a prominent role in the learning of literacy. Up to the age of seven, children would remain in the women's quarters of the castle or manor house and it was usually the mother or the nurse who would teach them the alphabet. Among the stock phrases or expressions in the *Nominale sive verbale* (c. 1300) (an English-French glossary of standard words and expressions for the use of the insular aristocracy) we find, significantly, the set phrase: *Femme enprent enfant sur liuere* = *Woman lernyth chylde on boke* (l. 145–146), 'Woman teaches her child to read from a book'. Similarly, the *Life of Saint Thierry of Leernes* (d. 1087), abbot of Saint-Hubert in the Ardennes, describes a conflict surrounding his vocation similar to that described above in the *Life of Hugh of Cluny*, between his father and his mother. The father wanted to turn him into a down-to-earth knight (*terrenus miles*) like himself; but the anonymous hagiographer of Thierry of Leernes supplies the interesting detail that his mother ordered that he be secretly instructed in letters at home (§4). There is a more specific example in the *Life of Saint Bernard of Menthon* (who lived in Savoie in the eleventh century), which claims that at the age of two or three, as soon as he was able to speak, he was taught to spell out letters and then to combine syllables from his mother's prayer book (I, 2). At the time, most ladies would have owned a copy of this book of devotions, which was a psalter containing a translation of the Vulgate canticles of praise attributed to King David.

Family instruction was as rudimentary as most laymen's knowledge of Latin. The more diligent parents merely taught their children the alphabet and the translation of some words from Latin. It was common for a no-

³ Contamine, *La Guerre au Moyen Âge*, 469.

bleman to delegate the literary instruction of his children to a more learned private tutor. The list of subscribers and witnesses to charters, but also the royal accountants who preserved the emoluments, occasionally mention these private tutors who belonged to the entourage of high-ranking nobles. Their name is sometimes followed by the title of master (*magister*), pedagogue (*pedagogus*), private tutor (*preceptor*), doctor (*doctor*), or teacher (*nutritus*, literally ‘one who nourishes’, in accordance with the food metaphor which is often used for education during the Middle Ages). It has also been noted that ‘mistresses’ (*magistræ*) looked after the young girls of the house.⁴ In short, the tutor was a familiar figure in the castle, whose rank would seem to be closer to that of the knights and chaplains of the lord’s private retinue than that of the ordinary servants in charge of subordinate tasks.

Fiction of the time presents such tutors in a positive light. At the beginning of the romance *Ipomedon*, written around 1180 by Hue de Rotelande in Anglo-Norman octosyllables, Hermogène de Puglia, ‘a valiant knight most enthusiastic about “clergy”’, asks Tholomeu, ‘the most courteous master that any powerful king ever had in the world’, to look after his son and to make him, like his father, ‘most literate and endowed with “clergy”’ (l. 173–174, 199–205). The tutor and his pupil then depart for the court of Calabria where the most beautiful princess the boy has heard of lives. Written in the north of France between 1200 and 1230, the romance *Blancandin* also portrays a young protagonist who is entrusted to a *latinier* or *latimer*, a word which designates both Latin scholar and polyglot. The teacher was ‘so learned that he taught him all the languages’ (l. 37–38). Even if they are fictional, the two works nevertheless identify the social role of the courtly tutor, although admittedly in an idealized fashion. In this way, the authors indirectly express their approval of the literary education of the young nobles and admiration for the erudition of their fathers. It should also be noted that these works are inspired by a background of Byzantine or Roman themes. This ancient setting perhaps makes them more sensitive to the culture of their respective heroes, whose education and manners contribute to their success at a sophisticated court. Their interest for letters is certainly more in evidence when compared to the Arthurian romances and even more so compared to the *chansons de geste*, both of which are much less forthcoming on the subject of the ‘clergy’. To borrow a medieval terminology, the Matter of Rome highlights knowledge more strongly than the Matter of Britain or of France.

⁴ Lesne, *Les Écoles en Gaule*, 453–456, Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 18–21, 24–26.

The profession of tutor would seem to have been particularly widespread in large towns, where many students could find employment as tutors in private homes in order to support themselves. In his *Metalogicon*, John of Salisbury describes earning a living in Paris by tutoring children of the nobility (II, 10). In his *Commentary to Cicero's De Inventione* John of Salisbury's teacher, Thierry of Chartres (d. c. 1150), who was more demanding regarding the presence and regular attendance in class of the young clerics, strongly criticizes those so-called scholars who were greedier than they were knowledgeable and who took up employment as tutors in the homes of the wealthy to the detriment of their own studies (p. 41). In the countryside, the nobles could ask the priest who officiated in their chapel or in the local parish to impart some rudiments of Latin culture to their children. Thus either on a permanent or a temporary basis there were tutors, often recruited amongst the clerics, to be found in the homes of the aristocracy and more especially of the urban aristocracy.

In his autobiography (written between 1114 and 1117), the Picard monk Guibert of Nogent (1053–1124) provides precise details of the tutor who instructed him between the ages of six and twelve. His mother, who was a young widow, had looked for a private tutor to teach him Latin, of which he had only acquired vague notions at home. But she was unable to find one immediately 'because there were no grammarians at that time in the villages and there were few even in the towns, and their knowledge was slight, even compared to the minor itinerant clerics of the present time' (I, 4). Often cited by the specialists, this passage, which describes respectively the period around 1060 and the period around 1110, underlines the considerable progress made by the school system during a period of the revival of learning. It also provides a reflection of the intellectual optimism of the twelfth century regarding the 'modern' period (*tempus modernum*) that they considered themselves fortunate enough to experience. Over a period of fifty years, the Latin scholars had increased in number as they had in their level of knowledge.

The lack of tutors did not discourage Guibert's mother, who turned to the clerics of her chapel in order to help her find one. She eventually managed to find a tutor who had abandoned her ill-disciplined and lazy cousin. He moved in to her castle where he became not only a private tutor to the young man but also a sort of substitute father figure, after Guibert experienced a dream in which he imagined himself expressing his close affection for his tutor. With exemplary austerity, the tutor instilled moral principles into Guibert above all else ('modesty, decency, and good manners'), with a daily dose of slaps and caning to bring home the point.

Despite his severity, the ageing Guibert recognized the decisive direction that his tutor had provided in his life: he could have become a knight, but his education and his liking for letters had been decisive in his choice of a monastic vocation. However, he also considered that his tutor's lack of knowledge in 'the art of writing and versification' was crass ignorance. Acquired later on in life, Guibert considered that his tutor's knowledge in this field was not worthy of a grammarian who was supposed to introduce his pupils to letters and the classics (I, 5–6). His tutor belonged to a previous generation whose lack of knowledge was inversely proportionate to their moral rigour. His charisma stemmed not so much from his rhetorical abilities or his knowledge as from his wisdom. In the final analysis, when going over his memories, Guibert echoes the dialectical tension felt by many of his contemporaries, between the ancients and the modernists, between the cloister and the school. As a monk, he appreciated the conscience of the former and the knowledge of the latter.

There were larger numbers of tutors teaching letters at the courts of kings, dukes, and counts. They taught the young princes and, alongside them, other children, mostly from the high ranking aristocracy. Once their employers' children had reached adulthood, they were allowed to continue running a sort of palatine school for a small number of privileged children. This system was institutionalized from the time of Charlemagne or earlier, and became standard practice in Western Europe. In 1058, Eudes de Saint-Maur-les-Fossés wrote in his biography of Bouchard I (956–1007), count of Vendôme, that 'this boy was sent by his parents to the royal court [...] where he was educated in all celestial and military affairs in accordance with the customs of the high ranking Franks' (I), in other words, in religious and intellectual as well as military affairs. The more prestigious the court, the more important this pedagogical function became, as is illustrated in the praise of Welf V (1101–1120), duke of Bavaria in the *History of the Welfs*: 'His home was so well run that the noble families of both provinces [Saxony and Bavaria] strongly desired to entrust the education of their sons to his *magisterium*'. Boys from the upper aristocracy who were brought up in close contact with the future king or duke formed links of friendship with them which might later become bonds of unshakeable feudal loyalty. If they were younger siblings with no inheritance or members of the lower ranking local nobility, their literary knowledge would fit them to work in the administration of the prince to whom they owed their whole education.

Other young boys who came from further away might learn, in addition to Latin, the language spoken at the host court. A relative or a protégé

of Cardinal Rolando Bandinelli, professor of canon law in Bologna and future Pope Alexander III, was recommended to Henry II of England by Arnoul (1141–1184), bishop of Lisieux, who mentioned him in one of his letters (ep. 15). Children might also be exchanged between princes during a peace treaty, which they would thus confirm in the role of potential hostages. Such was the case with the son of Baldwin V (1171–1195) count of Hainaut, who was entrusted into the care of Henry VI (1169–1197), king of Germany, in 1189, following their negotiations in Kaiserwerth. In his *Chronicle of Hainaut* (1195–1196), Gilbert of Mons (d. 1225), chancellor of Baldwin V, claims that the child was therefore able to ‘learn the German language and the customs of the court’ (p. 208). During the same period, the powerful Henry the Lion (1142–1195), duke of Saxony and Bavaria, expressed a similar interest for such opportunities for ‘language exchanges’. In a letter of recommendation, he thanked Louis VII (1137–1180) of France for the welcome he would offer to its bearer, the son of one of his most loyal vassals. In exchange, he encouraged Louis to send him boys who might become acquainted with his lands and learn to speak his tongue (ep. 117). His behaviour might suggest ulterior motives, since it would have been in Henry’s political interest to strengthen his links with the king of France at a time when he was in open revolt against the Holy Roman Emperor, Frederick I Barbarossa.

At court, educational tasks were sometimes overseen by a nobleman from the inner circle of the prince’s entourage who would be in charge of organizing the education of the king’s sons and their playmates and who would co-ordinate the teaching of fencing masters, music teachers, grammarians, and chaplains. This nobleman was sometimes a high ranking secular aristocrat such as the illegitimate son of Hugh of Chester, Otheur d’Avranches, who was also guardian of the Tower of London, and had been married by Henry I to the wealthy widow of Hugh of Mandeville. Orderic Vitalis describes him as ‘tutor and teacher’ of William Adelin, the only legitimate son of the king of England, and even how tutor and pupil perished together when the ship they were travelling on, the *White Ship*, sank in the Channel on 25 November 1120. Otheur tried to save William by holding him in his arms but drowned together with the boy (XII, 26). In describing Otheur’s action, the chronicler emphasizes the mentor’s supreme devotion towards his pupil.

The tutor in charge of royal children was often a bishop. In another example from England, the bishop of Lincoln, Robert Bloet (1093–1123), chancellor of William II ‘Rufus’ (1087–1100) and justiciar of Henry I, educated the latter’s illegitimate son Richard. The historian Henry of Hun-

tingdon (c. 1080–c. 1154), archdeacon of Lincoln, had spent time with the tutor and his pupil during his childhood. In his *Contempt for the World* (1135), he remembers the time when Bishop Robert ‘surrounded by youngsters of high nobility’ would teach them in his bishop’s palace, which was as luxurious as it was festive. With an ambivalent mixture of nostalgia and contempt for the world (*contemptus mundi*), he reminisces over a happy period of his life which ended suddenly with the disgrace and the illness of Robert and the sinking of the *Blanche Nef* which resulted in the drowning of Richard and his friends (§1). Several decades later the situation in England had hardly changed. Before being ordained a bishop in 1162, when he was still Chancellor and friend of Henry II, Thomas Becket looked after the king’s sons and several other boys. Becket himself appointed their tutors and oversaw their teaching. In his *Life of Thomas Becket*, William Fitz Stephen informs us that the Saint was not himself highly educated, but, at that priestly period of his career, he could rely on fifty-two well-educated clerics in his entourage who taught the children Latin on a daily basis (§5, 12, 18). And yet Robert Bloet and Thomas Becket are only one example of many bishops at court who were wholly devoted to the king and who looked after the education of his offspring. By teaching them letters, these episcopal tutors ensured the children were instilled at the same time into the good manners and the art of ruling.⁵ In conclusion, the royal or episcopal palace played a significant role in the education of the high ranking nobility.

In the monastic, cathedral, and parish schools

Throughout the West during the whole of the early Middle Ages the monasteries taught letters to oblates, that is, children who were offered to a religious community for life. The *Monastic Constitutions* of Lanfranc (1009–1089), abbot of Bec in Normandy and later archbishop of Canterbury, describes the ceremony in which the mother and father lead their tonsured child to the altar of the abbey-church during the offertory of the mass. After giving the bread and wine to the priest, they wrap their son’s hands in the altar cloth. In accordance with the rule of Benedict of Nursia (d. 547), they then undertake to do nothing to encourage their child to abandon the monastic vocation and their promise is recorded in a charter.

⁵ Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*, 19–53, 44–46, 213–217, *The Envy of Angels*, 297–309.

The boy then ceremoniously removes his secular clothes and puts on the monk's cowl (§105). The parents' undertaking to encourage their son's monastic vocation suggests a *contrario* that a return to a worldly existence was, if not frequent, then at least possible. In theory, however, oblation was irrevocable. It was only at the end of the twelfth century that canon law required the consent of the oblates, upon coming of age, before the pronouncing of their vows; this was similar to the requirement of consent laid on couples to be married in order to validate their union.⁶ Alongside the *oblati*, the monastic texts sometimes mention the *nutriti*. Unlike the former, with whom they shared a cloistered existence, the *nutriti*, or pupils, knew for certain that they would eventually return to a worldly existence.

Zbigniew's stay in a convent of Saxon nuns, around 1090, and his subsequent ducal rule prove that monastic education did not necessarily lead to a monastic life. This is reminiscent of the story in the fictional *Quest for the Holy Grail* (1225–1230) concerning Galahad, the illegitimate son of Lancelot and paragon of 'celestial chivalry', a religious and paradoxically pacifist knighthood. Galahad was also brought up by cloistered nuns during his childhood (§3). The two monasteries in question were female monasteries, so it was of course impossible for either Zbigniew or Galahad to remain there on reaching adulthood. But there are a much larger number of examples of knights educated in male abbeys. Around 1080, the Norman Ilger Bigod, a member of the family of the earls of Norfolk, was trained at Bec, whose abbot was none other than the Piedmontese Anselm (1033–1109), the future archbishop of Canterbury and the most brilliant theologian of his time. Ilger later took part in the First Crusade and became the 'master of the knights' of Bohemond I (1098–1111), prince of Antioch and a fellow Norman. In his *History of Recent Events in England*, the monk Eadmer of Canterbury (d. c. 1124) writes that Ilger returned to his homeland in 1106, where he once again met Anselm 'whom he had known since his teenage years and from whom he had received so much kindly attention'. He gave Anselm, and the monastery of Bec where 'he had reached adulthood', hair that Mary had taken from Jesus at the crucifixion. To prove the authenticity of this relic, Ilger quotes documents in the archives of the patriarch of Antioch which he had written, and which he had perhaps read, in Greek or Syriac.⁷ Another case of

⁶ Berend, 'La subversion invisible: la disparition de l'oblation'.

⁷ Eadmer, 'Historia Novorum', 179–181. For the identification between *Ilgyrus* and Ilger Bigod, see Riley-Smith, 'The Motives of the Earliest Crusaders', 730–731.

monastic education is the future king Louis VI (1108–1137) who was educated (*nutritur*) at Saint-Denis, as Louis' adviser, abbot Suger (d. 1151), proudly remembers in his *On What Was Done in His Administration* (§14), written around 1145. During their teenage years, Ilger Bigod and Louis VI therefore had the fortune to receive a good education from some of the monks who made the greatest cultural impression on their times.

It was not only princes and the very high ranking aristocracy who benefited from the monastic education. The middle and lower nobility also had access to this system. A dozen or so eleventh- and twelfth-century charters preserved in the cartularies of monasteries in northern France were drawn up by lords who, in exchange for giving lands to a particular abbey, obtained a promise from the monks that they would provide literary education for their sons. Such contracts sometimes gave specific leave for the child to return to a worldly existence if he so desired.⁸ Around 1170, the anonymous *Chronicle* of the Abbey of Ramsey, in Cambridgeshire, describes how four noble youths who had been undergoing an education in the abbey for several years found mischievous amusement in ringing the great bells of the western tower of the abbey. They were not strong enough to hold one of the ropes resulting in damage to the bell. Their tutors and the monks recommended exemplary punishment, but to the surprise of all and sundry the abbot decided not to punish them because, he argued, their act revealed no malice and the bell broke accidentally. He merely reprimanded them in private. The boys then went to the abbey-church to pray to Christ and the patron saints of the monastery, promising them that they would repair the damage. The anonymous chronicler adds: 'Later, when God raised them to high standing in this world and granted them badges of honour, they remembered their prayers and gave huge, incalculable gifts to our abbey' (§64). The ending to the story indicates that these boys left Ramsey for good and took up their family inheritance, from which they made generous provision for the monastery. In such cases, the young pupils were not enclosed within monastery walls for life and they could quit it to undertake a military career. The education they received from the monks could even be an advantage for their subsequent success.

Monastery education was, however, criticized by some. Certain reformers were of the opinion that educating lay persons was of no benefit to the monastic community and that, on the contrary, the monks' provid-

⁸ Lesne, *Les Écoles en Gaule*, 419, 434–441.

ing this service was a distraction from prayer and contemplation. This objection was voiced particularly by the Cistercians. In 1134, the *Statutes* proclaimed at the general chapter which brought together all the Cistercian abbots explicitly withdrew from 'the literary education of children' (t. 1, pp. 31, 84) under the age of 15, the age being extended to 18 in 1175. In this context, monks who taught were generally held in poor regard. Peter Abelard, who continued to teach after having become a monk, was criticized in an acrimonious letter sent to him just before 1120 by his enemy Roscelin (d. c. 1125). In this letter Abelard's former teacher in Tours reminded him of the quotation from Saint Jerome which was well-known in the Middle Ages: 'The duty of a monk is not to teach but to weep. He must lament this world and wait in the fear of God for the next' (p. 80). In his *Rule for a Solitary* (1160–1166), the Cistercian Ælred de Rievaulx strictly forbade nuns from turning their cell into a school by adopting the practice of teaching young girls, who remained outside under the portico, through their small cell window. He provided two reasons for his decision. Firstly, the children might remind the nuns of the world they had abandoned and, secondly, their pupils' affection might awaken their sensuality (§3).⁹ Distrust of monastic teaching, which went at least as far back as *The Rule of Saint Benedict*, increased in consequence of the reform of Saint Benedict of Aniane (d. 821). An increasing number of examples of this distrust could be provided for the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Nevertheless, many of those in religious orders found ways of getting round the teaching ban. Alongside the schools within the walls of religious institutions, which were reserved for oblates and novices, some monasteries opened external schools close by, which they sometimes entrusted to one of their monks, or more often to secular clerics.¹⁰ The *Deeds of the Saints* of the Cistercian monastery of Villers-en-Brabant mentions that around 1200 the young Abundus (d. 1228), from Huy, 'was sent there by his father to study letters and hence learn how to write down his debts and commercial affairs' (9, 9). However, Abundus went against the wishes of his family, who wanted him to become a good businessman, able to read, write, and count, by becoming a monk. Such is the description of his life handed down to us in the form of a funeral elegy composed by his brothers. His example is revealing as regards access to the monastic schools for children whose parents wished them to acquire education to

⁹ Cf. more generally, Boquet, *L'Ordre de l'affect au Moyen Âge*.

¹⁰ Lesne, *Les Écoles*, 430–434, Delhay, *Enseignement et morale au XIII^e siècle*, 5–19.

ensure success in the world. And yet Villers was part of the Cistercian order which advocated strict observance of Saint Benedict's Rule, and the Cistercian general chapters firmly renewed the teaching prohibitions.

As they fell under the more flexible rule of Saint Augustine, the canons regular often provided teaching in villages and small towns. Before leaving to study in Paris and entering Cîteaux, the young Bernard of Clairvaux obtained a good mastery of Latin and rhetoric at the ordinary canon school of Saint-Vorles, near Châtillon-sur-Seine, a small town.¹¹ Shrewsbury, in the west of England, would appear to have been of a similar size. The Norman Roger of Montgomery received it with all Shropshire during the Conquest. In his *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic Vitalis describes how his own father, a cleric from Orleans in the Montgomery entourage, entrusted him, from the age of five to eleven, to Sirward, a priest who taught in the parish church of Saint Peter's, Shrewsbury (V, 1). In the smaller villages, it was the curates and local priests who dealt with post-elementary education. They could also delegate teaching to clerics or secular teachers working under their supervision. It may be one of these parish schools that John of Salisbury refers to in a passage of the *Policraticus* in which he condemns sorcery (II, 28). As a child he 'had to learn the psalms' with a priest who spent more time with his young pupils divining the signs made by holy oils on a mirror or in a cauldron while pronouncing magic formulae. John's reminiscences evidently indicate his disdain for a teacher whose theological orthodoxy and cultural knowledge left much to be desired.

In the towns, the variety of teaching would seem to have been much greater compared to the rural areas and the quality higher. Each cathedral had a parish or choir school which taught grammar, catechism, and music to the choirboys and young singers. The cathedrals' canon chapters organized education based on the *trivium* and *quadrivium* for tonsured clerics: this teaching was increasingly relegated to the basic preparatory level. Indeed, as in traditional monastic culture, philosophy, morals, and especially theology were still considered to be the ultimate aim and highest achievement of all learning. However, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries teaching diversified and widened. Physics, medicine, economics, and politics (which were central to the work of Aristotle as rediscovered in the West) were added to the seven liberal arts. It was up to the scholaster, one of the chapter's dignitaries, in agreement with the bishop, to grant permission to teach (*licentia docendi*), after having tested the knowledge and the

¹¹ Verger and Jolivet, *Le Siècle de saint Bernard et Abélard*, 73–75.

doctrinal orthodoxy of the candidates. The students who were authorized to teach obtained the title of *magister* and could, in turn, teach if they so wished. In the largest cities, the canons regular provided also teaching. This was the case in the monastery of Saint-Victor, on the Montagne Sainte-Geneviève, a hill on the left bank of the Seine in Paris.

A few teachers, such as the popular Peter Abelard, managed to found their own schools and were able to make a living from the fees paid directly to them by their students. The number of these teachers, who were independent from the cathedral schools, increased at the end of the twelfth century. They could be 'qualified' by the institutional system controlled by the scholaster and the bishop, but the latter did not appreciate a teaching which was not under their control. They were, however, able to count on the support of the papacy. At the beginning of the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III allowed teachers and their students to come together in universities (the term *universitas* at that time designated any community or association), which were granted a specific status independent of the episcopacy. Of an essentially religious nature, the teaching both in the cathedral schools and in the universities was mostly designed to train future priests.¹² Although they did not participate in this teaching directly, the knights might take advantage of it indirectly in their conversations with students and graduates whom they sometimes appointed to tutor their own children or to officiate in the chapels of their castles. Even if this informal dissemination of new knowledge was minimal, it nevertheless contributed towards raising the general cultural awareness of the aristocracy which increased considerably at the end of the thirteenth century and during the fourteenth century, whilst translations in the vernacular helped to spread philosophical and theological texts which were written in the universities and which started to appear in the princely courts and further afield in the libraries of the more educated laymen.¹³

From cloister to secular life

After several years of higher level education, in some cases the youngest sons of the nobility abandoned the ecclesiastical career their parents intended for them. Orderic Vitalis mentions the example of Raoul (d. 1062), the fifth son of Giroie de Montreuil, who was aptly nicknamed 'the

¹² Verger, 'Les écoles urbaines', and *L'Essor des universités au XIIIe siècle*.

¹³ Imbach, *Dante, la philosophie et les laïcs*, 176.

Cleric' (*Clerc*) or the 'Ill-Tonsured'. From his childhood onwards Raoul took a keen interest in the study of letters, attending schools all over Gaul and even in Italy. 'His knowledge included grammar, dialectics, astronomy, and music'. According to Orderic, he even studied at the medical school of Salerno, where he was equalled by none 'except a female physician', probably an allusion to the legendary Trotula. Despite his education he preferred 'military training and other frivolities during his youth', but he eventually converted, becoming a monk at Marmoutier (Touraine) where he asked God for leprosy in order to purify his sins. His wish was granted and he died a saint (t. 2, pp. 28, 76). In short, the Ill-Tonsured followed a long course of studies, became a knight, and decided finally to take up military career to redeem himself by turning to a late monastic vocation. Both Raoul's conversion and his learning were admired not only by his monastic chronicler but also by his lay acquaintances: 'He excelled in the art of medicine and he knew much of higher and secret things. It is for this reason that the elders still speak of him to their children and grandchildren with admiration' (p. 28).

Raoul de Giroie lived at the beginning of the eleventh century, at a period when clerical status and discipline regarding ecclesiastical celibacy had still not been clearly defined. The exclusion of senior clerics from a military career and from marriage would seem to have been increasingly respected from the first third of the twelfth century onwards, at a time when the principles of the Gregorian reform triumphed in the West. There were, however, numerous exceptions to this trend. Clerics still went into battle, despite the fact that this was repeatedly forbidden. Such was the case of Alberon de Montreuil (1131–1152), archbishop of Trier and papal legate, who led his troops into Germany and as far as Italy in defense, of the reforms and the papacy. One of the masters of his cathedral school, Baudri de Florennes (d. 1157/58), admiringly set down Alberon's *Deeds*, including his military performances, in writing. Half a century later, Robert de Clari (d. c. 1216), a modest knight from Ponthieu who participated in the Fourth Crusade, describes the heroic deeds of his brother Aleaume under the walls of Constantinople in 1204 while wearing a coat of mail and on horseback. Some of the knights wanted to deprive Aleaume of his share of the spoils on the pretext that he was a cleric and in accordance with the custom for clerical combatants (§75–76, 98). Through their military activities, the archbishop of Alberon and the more modest cleric, Aleaume de Clari, blurred the boundaries between the status of cleric and knight, which were in fact considerably more porous than is suggested by the conciliar and canonical decrees.

Some knights seem to be ex-clerics. They return to lay state, carrying arms, living in wedlock, and managing the family domain. Shortly before 1120, Dagobert asked his elder brother Peter Abelard to write his *Dialectica*, a voluminous book on logic, which he intended to use to teach his own children: the length and complexity of the work seems to suggest that Dagobert must have been an educated knight who had undertaken considerable clerical studies before marrying.¹⁴ The story of Gervase of Tilbury (c. 1150–c. 1230), a member of the Anglo-Norman aristocracy and a relative of the earl of Salisbury, looks similar. He obtained the title of *magister* after having studied canon law in Bologna and, on returning to England, went to the court of Henry II and his son Henry the Young King. He subsequently turns up in the entourage of Guillaume aux Blanches Mains (d. 1202), archbishop of Rheims. At the end of the 1180s, Gervase returned to the service of William II, king of Sicily and a nephew of Henry II, and then to that of Imbert d'Eyguières (1191–1202), archbishop of Arles, marrying a close relative of the latter. In the 1200s, he served the Emperor Otto IV of Brunswick (1198–1218), who named him marshal of his palace for the kingdom of Arles. He also became a judge of the county of Provence. At the end of his life, after being widowed, he became a canon. His principal work is the *Otia imperialia* (1214–1215), an encyclopaedia and a collection of marvellous or extraordinary events all in one.¹⁵ His *licence* in ecclesiastical law and his presence in two episcopal curiae might suggest he was tonsured, but Gervase was married, which implies he was a layman. Lastly, according to Matthew Paris's *Chronica Maiora*, Gilbert Marshal, third son of William and regent of England, had been intended for the priesthood because his weak constitution was said to make him unfit for a martial career. Events were to prove the contrary, however, since he behaved in a virile and courageous manner to the credit of knightly ideals. He died in 1241 while taking part in a tournament (t. 4, p. 135). It was only five years before this, when he was in his thirties, that he had inherited the earldom of Pembroke, had married, and had adopted a military life.¹⁶ In fact, Dagobert, Gervase, and Gilbert were probably tonsured in their youth, undertaking advanced studies before founding a family and taking over the estate of their fathers or entering the service of royalty.

Fewer clerics would seem to have abandoned the archdeaconry or the priesthood to pursue a lay career after being ordained into a major order.

¹⁴ Clanchy, *Abélard*, 179.

¹⁵ Banks and Binns, 'Introduction' to their edition of the *Otia Imperialia*, xxv–xxxix.

¹⁶ Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 40.

Such a progression would have seemed anomalous to the society of that time. Such careers are therefore likely to have been more concealed, thus leaving fewer records in the texts from that time. There are, however, at least two known cases of canons leaving their chapter. First, towards 1100, the youngest brother of the lord of Berzé (in the Mâcon region, Burgundy) abandoned his community of canons and took over the family château and its military affairs on the death of his elder brother.¹⁷ Secondly, in 1162, Arnau de Palou (d. 1189) left the cathedral chapter of Barcelona to serve Raymond Berenguer III (1144–1166), count of Provence, who granted him lands in Vence, near Nice, in recognition of his services. His fellow clerics would seem to have held this against him, since the author of one of the cathedral charters reproaches him ‘for having followed a worldly path’.¹⁸ Probably, Arnaud became ill-reputed for having given up clergy. This explains the fact that he moved to the faraway lands governed by a count of the house of Barcelona, who benefited from Arnaud’s rhetorical and legal knowledge and who facilitated his later successful return.

These vignettes reveal how some knights entered orders, and particularly minor orders, during their youth. As tonsured clerics they would have studied the *trivium* and the *quadrivium*, and perhaps even medicine, philosophy, and theology; and yet they subsequently joined the ranks of the knights, thereby going against the initial intention that their families had decided for them. Their knowledge helped some of them to climb the rungs of the officialdom of a protecting prince. If we are to believe Orderic Vitalis’s account of one of these ‘ill tonsured’, their knowledge, and in this instance medical knowledge which helped to relieve suffering, aroused the admiration of their lay entourage.

Italian precocity and pragmatic knowledge

There were some urban centres of learning which were intended for laymen rather than for clerics. Such schools were more numerous in Italy than elsewhere in the West. In the Italian peninsula there were numerous private or municipal schools that had existed since Roman antiquity. In the eleventh century, Italian clerics travelling to the French side of the Alps were very critical of the level of education in the regions they vis-

¹⁷ Duby, ‘The Culture of the Knightly Class’, 260.

¹⁸ Aurell, ‘Le personnel politique catalan et aragonais en Provence’, 136.

ited. Ademar of Chabannes, a French chronicler from the Limousin region, strongly resented the assertions of Benedict, prior of San Michele de Chiusa (Piedmont), in denying that Saint Martial, the patron saint of his monastery, had been part of the apostolic college of the twelve apostles. Shortly before 1030, Ademar wrote a letter denouncing Benedict's alleged error, describing the latter in derogatory terms as a prig who boasted that he was the most erudite man in the world. He attributed to Benedict the following assertion, which seems to suggest an implicit inferiority complex in the Frenchman who had been subjected to the sarcasm of the Italian: 'All the Aquitanians are peasants and are totally lacking in knowledge of any kind [...]. There is knowledge, however, in [Île-de-]France, but too little. Lombardy, on the other hand, where I learnt most, is the source of all knowledge' (col. 107–108). This notion of the superiority of Italian culture is also to be found around the same period, although less contentiously. Ralph Glaber and Orderic Vitalis praise respectively William of Volpiano (c. 966–c. 1031) and Lanfranc of Pavia (1009–1089), whose program of monastic reform in Normandy included the setting up of schools based on the Italian model (§7; t. 2, p. 248). Lastly, on the accession of Emperor Henry III in 1039, Wipon of Burgundy, one of his courtly clerics, wrote for him the hexametric poem *Tetralogus*, requesting that he follow the example of Italy, the successor of Rome, 'which had been able to vanquish so many tyrants thanks to knowledge'. He continued: 'On the Italian side of the Alps all young men are required to study at school. It is only the Germans who think it is vain and shameful to spend time studying unless one is a cleric' (l. 198–200).

The respect of eleventh-century intellectuals, or Ademar's apparent inferiority complex towards Italian teaching, does correspond to a certain social reality as evidenced in the historically widespread network of schools in the Italian peninsula. Large numbers of young men, and not only those intended for the clergy, were able to benefit from these schools. Indeed, significant numbers of future knights studied in them. This novel situation was more pronounced in the northern part of the peninsula where a large number of aristocrats were as proficient at war as they were in business affairs for which writing and counting were essential. The foundations for the twelfth-century Renaissance were therefore older, deeper, and more solidly implanted in Northern Italy than in the rest of the West.

The higher Italian schools which trained their pupils for a secular career may be divided into three categories: the grammatical, the legal, and the medical schools. The first category trained teachers of children (*magistri puerorum*) and also, at a higher level, grammarians (*grammatici*) who

would in turn teach Latin and rhetoric. According to the *Nuova Cronica* ('New Chronicle') of Giovanni Villani (c. 1276–1348), who was always ready to exalt (and to exaggerate) the grandeur of Florence, there were between eight and ten thousand boys and girls following such teaching in Florence in 1338, out of a total population of somewhat less than one hundred thousand inhabitants (XII, 94). Other teachers were termed *abacistæ*, because they taught sums, arithmetic, and algorithms using an abacus, or counting frame, especially to future merchants and shopkeepers. Also, according to Giovanni Villani, these mathematics teachers had between one thousand and one thousand two hundred pupils in six different schools in Florence. In the thirteenth century, the town councils began to pay more attention to these small schools which they encouraged by attracting teachers to whom they granted privileged status. Urban authorities also set up regulations for greater control of these schools. These schooling policies sometimes led to the creation of centres of public education, especially in Siena, where there was a lack of private schools.

Legal and medical training was intended for boys who had already completed secondary school education. Those who obtained a *licence* in civil law were able to find more lucrative work than teaching young children. It was mainly in Bologna that lawyers, notaries, judges, and other officers of the princely and communal administration could obtain legal training which aimed above all at increasing efficiency. Medical training, taught mostly in Salerno, was of a similarly pragmatic nature. It is possible that some girls may have followed such medical training. Indeed, the ecclesiastical authorities encouraged a small number of women to take up the medical profession for reasons of propriety so that female patients might have the option to be auscultated by female doctors.

Around the beginning of the thirteenth century, fifteen or so Italian towns set up genuine universities. Henceforth, these universities provided legal training to an increasing number of future politicians. Their doctors (*doctores*) or university professors were sometimes able to participate in the task of government or to improve efficiency in business. In Italy, school knowledge would therefore seem to have been more pragmatic than elsewhere.¹⁹ The case of Ugolino Gosia provides a revealing example of the links between the academic world and the city. In 1201 he abandoned his chair of law to be dubbed and become *podestà* or chief magistrate of Ancona (in the Marche region), but not without having first requested his students for their permission. This act reveals clearly his at-

¹⁹ Frova, 'Écoles et universités en Italie', 63–71; Cardini, 'Intellectuals and Culture', 23.

tachment to the university and to his students. Despite being shipwrecked along the way, his colleague Boncompagno da Signa (c. 1170–c. 1240), a professor of rhetoric, arrived with him in the city of Ancona and gave a public reading of Ugolino's opusculum on the *History of the siege of Ancona*, which described the heroic resistance of its inhabitants against Imperial and Venetian troops in 1173. In this book he describes his friend, the new *podestà*, in appropriately glowing terms. In passing, he also provided some details of Ugolino's social status, reminding us that this 'noble citizen of Bologna', born into an old family of jurists, was dubbed by the Emperor so that he might take over the office which the Anconians asked him to (pp. 156–160). The jurist Ugolino, and, to a lesser extent, the rhetorician Boncompagno belonged to the same lettered aristocracy who put their legal or literary knowledge to the service of government. Their higher education equipped them with the tools required for the good governance of their town.

The practical and profitable nature of law, medicine, and of a certain form of rhetoric was not always favourably viewed by philosophers and theologians, who looked down on them as second-rate. Around 1160, John of Salisbury objected vigorously to the 'Cornificians' or sophists who, instead of leading the austere life of the scholar and rigorously pursuing truth, grew rich instead by practising the so-called liberal arts. A century later, Roger Bacon, in Oxford, inveighed against the 'scourge of lawyers'. During the same period, the University of Paris abandoned the idea of setting up a law faculty which might compete with the more prestigious and more spiritually elevated teaching of theology. This bias reflects a clerical conception of knowledge. From the end of the twelfth century, the councils banned priests or clerics holding a paid ecclesiastical benefice from practising the legal and medical professions.²⁰ Such studies did indeed bring power and money and therefore also attracted contempt from the more rigid celibate intellectuals among the clergy who viewed austerity and lack of attachment to worldly goods as key values and the preconditions for success in their demanding search for truth.

The acceptance or rejection of practical knowledge was not only a point of discord between the various branches of learning or in the organization of higher studies since this issue went well beyond the narrowly circumscribed world of the clergy. This repudiation of pragmatic forms of knowledge touched a sensitive area in the difference of identity between clerics and knights, or between the lettered and the unlettered. It reflected

²⁰ Delhaye, *Enseignement et morale au XIIIe siècle*, 54–58.

the gap which separated two different worlds. On the one hand, letters, philosophy, and theology were studied for their own sake by men of the Church who were detached, at least in theory, from the attractions of the world and the lowly material contingencies of everyday life. On the other hand, more mundane studies were undertaken by the knights and merchants who took advantage of the knowledge thus acquired to increase their worldly influence and wealth.

Methods of learning, new programmes, and the spread of writing in the vernacular

Among the aristocracy, children were made familiar with alphabet primers from an early age. Archaeological finds have revealed to us a number of everyday objects with the letters of the alphabet inscribed on them: leather belts, embroidered fabrics, tablets made of wood or plaster, and so on. Mealtimes were a preferred time for such learning, with the Latin verb *nutrire* signifying both to nourish and to educate. Hence, we find alphabet primers on bowls but also on cakes and sweets. At the age of six or seven, children began to learn to read, almost always in Latin, with tutors who used mnemonics, nursery rhymes, reading games, and even, from 1200 onwards, illustrative images of the alphabet. In this phase of learning, the memorization of prayers and other texts through group repetition would seem to have been predominant. There was indeed a strong oral influence on writing, with children chanting out aloud and clearly pronouncing the syllables they were reading. The versicle *Domine, labia mea aperies* ('Lord, open my lips', psalm 50, *Miserere*) often appears in these books as a metaphor for vocalization in which the written word transits, of necessity, through the voice. The texts used were mostly psalms and other passages from Scripture, including the Decalogue, as well as prayers, in particular the Hail Mary. Collections of proverbs such as the *Distichs of Cato* and extracts of basic grammar from Donatus and Priscian were also learnt. These elementary texts were written on tablets or parchment which also contained the alphabet primers.²¹

After primary education, based mostly on grammar, children would perfect their Latin and also their oratorical abilities through the two other disciplines of the *trivium*, dialectics and rhetoric. Anthologies of the Roman classics were often used to assist learning, including authors such as

²¹ Alexandre-Bidon, 'La lettre volée: apprendre à lire'.

Cicero, Seneca, Lucan, Virgil, Ovid, and Statius. The disciplines of the *quadrivium* were not neglected, however. Music could be learnt in the cathedral. In his romance *Blanquerna* (1274–1279), the Franciscan tertiary Raymond Lull describes the protagonist, the son of a wealthy merchant and a noble wife, leaving the family home each morning accompanied by his tutor to go to Mass and then to attend the lessons of liturgical singing before going on to school and only returning home in the afternoon (I, 2). Some teachers, such as the aforementioned Raymond Lull in his *Doctrina pueril* ('The Education of a Child' LXXIV, 9) or the Franciscan Guillaume de Tournai (d. 1293) in his *Instruction of Children* (§30), strongly advise against the study of astronomy, which is dangerously close to divining and may cause pupils to turn away from God.

In the above-mentioned work, Raymond Lull is ahead of his time since he recommends the use of Arabic instead of Roman numerals for the teaching of arithmetic, arguing that children memorize Arabic numerals better visually (LXXIV, 5). In addition to geometry, another discipline of the *quadrivium*, the masters also passed on some basic notions of Biblical history, physics, law, and medicine. Most of these masters were clerics and they accorded great importance to Christian doctrine and morals. Despite their scholastic approach, their teaching was not limited to passing on knowledge: they also passed on values and attempted to shape the behaviour of their pupils, aiming at a more holistic education. After completing their secondary studies, some nobles with sufficient income were able to attend cathedral schools or universities, which then allowed them to obtain an ecclesiastical benefice, although most of them left school immediately, married, and took over the family domain.

Latin certainly slowed down and complicated not only the process of teaching children to read but also their further studies. The idea of learning to read in Latin, which no one dared to call a dead language during the Middle Ages, is certainly foreign to our contemporary European way of thinking, since we have been shaped for centuries in the national mould. Yet, the separation of the written and spoken languages was widespread in ancient civilizations and is still the case in various contemporary cultures. In addition, at a time when there was a lack of available translations, mastery of Latin provided access to almost all texts preserved in the West. It was likewise essential in legal matters since in the thirteenth century almost all contracts were still written in Latin.

It was quite rare at that time to have recourse to reading manuals in the vernacular in order to circumvent the obstacles posed by Latin. One of the first known translations into French is a work with a clearly pedagogical

aim. The moral tendency of this book indeed suggests that its translation was a work aimed above all at children and teenagers. The *Proverbs of Salomon* was adapted into verse from a sapiential book of the Old Testament by the Anglo-Norman poet Samson of Nanteui during the reign of the English king Stephen (1135–1154). Samson claimed to be working at the request of Ælis de Condé, widow of the Lord of Horncastle (Lincolnshire), who was in charge of the education of his son Roger (l. 191–202). The *Chastoiment* (from the old French, meaning ‘punishment’ or rather ‘corrections, advice’) *from a Father to his Son* was also written in England around 1200 as a translation of the *Disciplina Clericalis* of Petrus Alphonsi, who had at one time stayed at the court of Henry I. Also in the middle of the thirteenth century, Denise of Montchensey, a widow from Hertfordshire who probably spoke better Middle English than Anglo-Norman, asked Walter of Bibbesworth, a local squire in Essex, to write for her a *Treatise of language*, to help her son perfect his French grammar and learn the technical vocabulary necessary for the management of an estate. After a dedication to the lady, the prologue of the work announces that the book will be written in both languages, and some of its manuscripts indeed provide a few words of English between the lines by way of translation of the most difficult French terms for the reader. These linguistic glosses were as widespread in Britain as the numerous glossaries which list equivalent words in French, English, and Latin.²² Indeed, the Norman aristocracy in England used an elite minority idiom with similar status, in many respects, to Latin in continental Europe. Sociolinguists call such coexistence of two languages, on two different levels, ‘diglossia’. The superior idiom was used for public life and exchanges of a more prestigious nature among the dominant class while the inferior idiom was relegated to the lower classes, to be used by the aristocracy only when addressing their servants or in daily business.

The *Doctrina pueril* (1274–1276), the first book which recommended the teaching of reading and writing in the vernacular, was written by Raymond Lull, born in Majorca the son of a rich nobleman from Barcelona who had participated in the conquest of the island after it had been in Muslim control for more than three centuries. Lull suggested that teachers use Catalan instead of Latin, and he himself used the former in most of his books and even in his philosophical works. This would appear to be a significant first for the use in the West of the vernacular for such an abstract and prestigious subject. Similarly to Anglo-Norman, his mother

²² Hunt, *Teaching and Learning Latin in Thirteenth-Century England*.

tongue was a colonial idiom in a largely Arabic speaking environment of Majorca. In the prologue, Lull requests 'that each father teach his son to spell words in the vernacular so that he might understand what he is reading' (1). Lull wrote his book in Catalan for his own son so that he might learn grammar in Catalan before studying Latin (LXXIII, 2). Further on, he writes for his son: 'Before learning logic in Latin, learn it first in Romance with the help of the lines at the end of this book. Do you know why? Because you will understand it better if you learn it in this way before moving on to Latin' (LXXIII, 8). For younger children, the use of their mother tongue certainly facilitates the assimilation of what is taught. During the same period, Giles of Rome (1243/47–1316), an Augustine monk and tutor of the future king Philip IV of France (1285–1314), wrote *De Regimine Principum* (c. 1270), a popular mirror for princes, giving them moral advice. This book appears to have been more demanding than *Doctrina pueril*. Giles of Rome believed in the superiority of Latin as the language par excellence of philosophy and literature and therefore recommended that it should be learnt by the nobility in early childhood (II, II, 7). He was, however, aware of the difficulty of Latin for 'those who were destined to take up arms and to govern' and accepted that the teaching of morals should sometimes be adapted to their capacities, which might involve a 'simplified and crude' version in the vernacular omitting certain casuistic or philosophical subtleties (II, II, 8).

Raymond Lull was close to King James II of Majorca (1276–1311), staying in the latter's palace on several occasions and working there as a tutor. At the beginning of his *Autobiography*, which was rewritten in Latin in the third person singular by his disciples shortly before his death, Lull describes his conversion at a mature age. Even though he says that he wrote love songs, he still considered himself 'unlettered, because in his youth he had only learnt a smattering of Latin grammar'. He therefore acquired mastery of Latin only later on in life. But Lull's use of Catalan to write most of his books is not simply a result of his ignorance of Latin. This is in keeping with the same missionary zeal which drove him to learn Arabic. By writing in Catalan, Lull hoped to be read and understood beyond clerical circles, in order to reform the religious life of the lay subjects of the crown of Aragon.

Even if they do not explicitly formulate such views, the pedagogues close to the French royal court in Lull's day shared his concern that children should be taught in Romance. They sometimes write their 'mirrors for princes', which instructed future kings on how to govern virtuously and efficiently, in their mother tongue. Around 1270, an anonymous Cis-

tercian monk wrote his *Miroir du monde* ('Mirror of the World') in French. This work was recopied and adapted, also in French, under the title of *Somme le roi* (1279) by the Dominican friar Laurent, confessor of King Philip III of France (1270–1285) and of his children. Also at the end of the thirteenth century, French began to be used for numerous allegorical poems of a moral nature.²³ The same is true for Castilian which was used in 1292–1293 for the *Castigos* (the equivalent of the French *Chastoiement*), which has been attributed to King Sancho IV of Castile (1284–1295). In German, *Der wälsche Gast* (translated freely as 'The Italian Visitor') by Thomasin von Zirclaere (d. 1238) was composed somewhat earlier, in 1215 or 1216. Von Zirclaere was a native of Friuli, and, like the Anglo-Norman authors, he uses what was in his country a foreign language, or at any rate a minority language, to teach courtesy. Even if he claims to be writing for knights, ladies, and clerics, his treatise is as didactic in nature as the other works for children mentioned above.

The same pedagogical intent is apparent in manuals on the management of rural estates. The first of these manuals were written in Anglo-French at the end of the thirteenth century. The anonymous *Seneschaucy*, for example, dates back to around 1270, inspiring Walter of Henley (c. 1240–1300) to write his more complete work, *Husbandry*, in 1286. Before becoming a Dominican, Henley had managed the agricultural estate of Isabella de Forz, a wealthy Midlands dowager. It was for the latter, who wished to train her offspring in the management of the family estate, that he composed *Husbandry*. The book is written in the form of advice given by a father to his son with precise instructions on such topics as the choice of a superintendant, the growing of cereal crops, and cattle breeding. A quarter of a century later, Pietro Crescenzi (c. 1240–1321), a lawyer and magistrate from Bologna, wrote his voluminous *Ruralia Commoda* (1304–1306), a more exhaustive, wider, and more comprehensively researched treatise on agricultural economy. Crescenzi's work was also more theoretical, providing long quotations from the ancient classics. Instead of its Latin, the book was quite disseminated in Italy because this language was more taught there than elsewhere.

During the thirteenth century, the increased use of the vernacular for works with pedagogical or moral aims, to the detriment of Latin, is an accurate indication of a change in attitudes. This must certainly have contributed to greater rates of literacy. Mother tongue in books for princes and secular lords opposes to the clerics' Latin. The increased use of the

²³ Zink, *La Subjectivité littéraire*, 249.

vernacular is an integral part of the intellectual Renaissance of the period. Similarly, this cultural renewal may be linked to the rising numbers of tutors. Members of High Nobility wanted more tutors than in the past in their own houses. Their children were also able to attend the teaching provided in the princely or episcopal courts. Boys from more modest lineages could attend the monastic, canon, or parish schools of their village. In the towns, there was a much wider choice. The educational progress of communal Italy provided its urban 'patriciat' with a multitude of possible courses of training. Their pragmatism reveals new attitudes towards knowledge which henceforth helped localize power in the hands of the officialdom of a state system undergoing a process of fundamental transformation.

THE LATIN OF THE KNIGHTS

In his *Education of a Prince* (1192–1218), Gerald of Wales mentions several oracles which foretold the worst catastrophes for the Angevin kings of England and their subjects. One of them was uttered by a ghost in the county of Glamorgan (South Wales). Gerald explains that shortly before 1208 the ‘benevolent as he was learned’ master Maurice, brother of the abbot of Neath, came face to face with a ‘lettered knight’ (*miles litteratus*) from that region who was long since deceased and with whom he used to enjoy improvising Latin poems when the knight was still of this world. One of them would compose a line, the other would compose the following line and so on until completion of the poem. The ghost asked him: ‘Master Maurice, finish this line: “May the King of Kings destroy this kingdom...”’ Once he had got over his initial fright, Maurice replied: ‘Since you have almost finished the line, it is up to you to provide the ending’; whereupon the ghost immediately complied by supplying: ‘May the King of Kings destroy this kingdom with a double scourge’. To conclude this anecdote, Gerald explains that two chastisements immediately fell upon England: the Pope’s canonical ban on England and, by way of reprisal, the despoilment of ecclesiastical property by the English king (III, 28).

The identities of the pair of individuals of the anecdote are revealing. On the one hand, we have Maurice, a gentle and cultivated professor of rhetoric who is either a cleric or a monk. He is also the brother of an abbot and probably teaches in the school of his brother’s monastery. On the other hand, we have a deceased ‘lettered knight’ who had sufficient mastery of Latin to be able to come up with improvised lines on a set theme and in a specific metre. If the character of Maurice, who is described by Gerald as the brother of Clement, abbot of Neath, did indeed exist, the name of his ghostly interlocutor is wisely omitted; but, although impossible to identify, the latter nonetheless represents the social type of the knightly Latin scholar. The ‘*jeu parti*’, a technical term used at that period to describe the exchange of improvised lines between two or more poets, was a well-documented pastime among the clergy and was also practiced, in the vernacular, by knights and jongleurs.

Despite its fantastic nature, the story of the educated knightly ghost therefore includes some realistic elements. It also provides a counter to John of Salisbury’s somewhat condescending insinuation in his *Policraticus* regarding knights who were able neither to write down, nor even to utter, their Latin oaths of knighthood and who merely left their sword,

rather than a parchment, on the altar: 'Who may ask of the illiterates, whose duty it is to be familiar with weapons rather than letters, to write out their profession?' (VI, 10). And yet this question might suggest another which would contradict the first: how numerous or widespread in twelfth- and thirteenth-century Western society were scholarly knights with a taste for Latin grammar and rhetoric? In the absence of quantifiable data, the answer regarding the proportion of Latin scholars among the knightly class can never be definitive or precise. The study of several cases may, however, shed some light on this question.

The Latin skills of Anglo-Norman knights

The abundant English and Norman historiography of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries provides useful information regarding the erudition of nobles closest to the king. The important Beaumont-Meulan family, for example, included several lettered knights. A friend of Henry I, Robert de Beaumont (d. 1118), earl of Leicester and count of Meulan, is one of the aristocrats who is mentioned with nostalgia and admiration in Henry of Huntingdon's *Contempt for the World*. He is praised more particularly for his political skill: 'Very much aware of lay affairs taking place anywhere between England and Jerusalem, he was extolled for his knowledge, being persuasive with words, astute in his shrewdness, sagacious in foresight, cunning in brilliance, unequalled in caution, profound in advice, and great in his wisdom' (§7). Thus, according to Huntingdon, Beaumont was endowed with prudence, foresight, shrewdness, and rhetorical persuasiveness, even cunning and astuteness, all qualities which would make him an excellent politician. In a semantic context emphasizing qualities which would help to gain and hold on to power, the words 'knowledge' (*scientia*) and above all 'wisdom' (*sapientia*) are synonymous with pragmatism and efficacy in the art of governing. Here, these words designate only very indirectly knowledge acquired from books. They refer rather to the cunning of a Ulysses and the experience of a Nestor, two figures who brought together *sapientia* and *fortitudo* which made Achaeans' victory upon Trojans.

Robert de Beaumont died in 1118, leaving two twin sons aged fourteen: Waleran de Beaumont, count of Meulan (1104–1166) and Robert de Beaumont, second earl of Leicester (1104–1168). Until then the boys had been educated at Abingdon Abbey (Berkshire), but after their father's death Henry I accepted them at the royal court, in memory of their father,

where they completed their education. They acquired a perfect command of Latin and it was naturally in this language that they conversed with the Italian cardinals who accompanied Pope Callixtus II (1119–1124) when he met Henry I at Gisors (in the Vexin region of Normandy) in November 1119. Six years later, in his *History of the English Kings*, the monk William of Malmesbury (c. 1090–c. 1143) describes how Henry used their precocious erudition as a means of impressing the Pope and his entourage in order to gain an advantage in their difficult negotiations: ‘To ensure the completeness of his splendour, the king secretly encouraged the illustrious offspring of the count of Meulan to argue about dialectics with the cardinals, who were unable to counter their tortuous sophisms and their lively reasoning. The cardinals shamefully acknowledged that there was a flourishing mastery of letters in these Western parts such as they had never witnessed before, nor even imagined possible, even in their own land’ (V, 406).

William of Malmesbury’s precise and rhetorical exposition of the triumph of the Beaumont twins over the most experienced members of the Curia in a dialectic *disputatio* can only be explained by the panegyric nature of his work in praise of the Norman kings of England. William was profoundly attached to Henry I, constantly praising the king’s decisions and even pardoning his notorious improper marital conduct on the pretext that it brought him abundant offspring. In William’s eyes, the idea of getting two teenage boys to successfully debate with the Cardinals had to be brilliant because it came from the king himself. It was also intended to corroborate the intellectual superiority of the Anglo-Norman kingdom (not without a certain dose of chauvinism) over Italy, a country which had always been so proud of its letters. William of Volpiano, the Lombard Lanfranc, and the Aostan Anselm had brought their Roman knowledge with them to these ‘Western countries’ where it blossomed in Norman England. Similarly to many other medieval chroniclers, Malmesbury adopts the *Translatio studii et imperii* model which leads inexorably towards the West to the detriment of the Roman East. In addition, William acted as a good Benedictine follower of traditional monastic theology in that he allowed to emerge between the lines of his description a certain contempt for dialectics (*dialectica*) and the tortuous sophisms (*tortilia sophismata*) so dear to the hearts of the Italian cardinals who had attended the urban Italian schools.

Imagine two teenagers managing to master the inextricable syllogisms of scholasticism with more vigour than the highest ranking prelates of the curia! This is of course close to the evangelical model of the boy Jesus in the Temple at the age of twelve arguing with the doctors of the Old Cove-

nant which he would soon abolish (Luke 2, 40–52). ‘Knowledge puffs up’ (1 Corinthians 8:1) the powerful cardinals. In contrast, out of the innocent mouths of babes and sucklings comes forth the truth, in all its simplicity: ‘But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise’ (1 Corinthians 1:27). This theme, taken up in the First Epistle to the Corinthians, is not exclusively an Old Testament or evangelical tradition. It also appears in pagan Latin literature which presented the *puer senex* (‘child who is old’) possessing supernatural maturity.²⁴ The oxymoron brings together the disorder, excess, and creativity of the former and the discipline, sense of responsibility, and rigour of the second, in accordance with the Nietzschean dialectic of Dionysus and Apollo.

Such archetypes are present in medieval narratives in which infants sometimes speak in order to deliver a prophecy to their community. Merlin is one such child prodigy, who successfully pleaded his mother’s innocence in front of the judges according to the romance *Merlin*, written in the first decade of the 1200s and attributed to Robert de Boron (§11–15). These imaginary representations provide a substratum to William of Malmesbury’s anecdote, which at the same time delivers us some information on the factual existence of a lettered aristocratic youth. In reality, however, the intellectual surrender of the old Roman priests in Gisors could only have taken place due to their amused condescension typically provoked by youngsters proud of their knowledge. Whatever William’s ulterior motives (and they might have been complex), the scene he describes is significant not least in that it reveals the Latin skills of certain young, high ranking Anglo-Norman aristocrats who had received such a training in the monasteries.

When they reached adulthood, Robert de Beaumont and Waleran de Meulan mixed with the most renowned intellectual clerics of their kingdom and the twins were not uncommonly praised for the breadth of their knowledge and the accuracy of their analytical thinking. In the *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury compliments Robert for the relevance of his observations regarding lese-majesty. He marvels at the earl of Leicester’s explanation of the seriousness of the offence to the monarchy by the argument the earl develops that such a crime is an attack against the person who, as monarch, is the representative of God on Earth (VI, 25). This political theology, which maintains the sacredness of the monarchy, is in keeping with Robert’s unshakeable loyalty to King Stephen of Blois. Shortly after his enthronement in 1154, Henry II chose Robert as his chief

²⁴ Curtius, *La Littérature européenne*, 176–180.

justiciar in England, in other words his principal adviser and supreme authority in the kingdom in the absence of the king. Richard Fitz Nigel (d. 1198), bishop of London and the royal treasurer, appears equally admiring of Robert in his *Dialogue of the Exchequer* (c. 1179), a manual on the functioning of the highest fiscal institution of the Crown. He writes as follows: 'I who am speaking knew Robert, earl of Leicester, in the past. He was a prudent man, well-educated in letters and experienced in legal affairs' (p. 88). Robert also kept up epistolary correspondence with Pope Alexander III (1159–1181), Gilbert Foliot, bishop of London (1163–1187), and also with Ælred of Rievaulx, the prolific Cistercian author. An anonymous treatise on astrology is dedicated to Robert.

Waleran de Meulan's erudition was in no way inferior to his brother's. He read and understood Latin charters in sufficient depth to be able to verify the authenticity of their content and their signs of validation.²⁵ His legal mastery by no means detracted from his interest in literature. Waleran wrote verse in Latin if we have to believe the obsequious praise of a Latin poem written by the monk Stephen of Rouen, who claims Waleran was the equal of Virgil (1, l. 28), a comparison which he also applies to Geoffrey le Bel, count of Anjou. Waleran was also one of the three dedicatees of Geoffrey of Monmouth's popular *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136–1137), a book which contributed greatly to the spread of the legend of Arthur on the continent. In accordance with the model of the literate knight, this dedication associates the knowledge which Waleran acquired during his childhood with his later feats of arms: 'You, who were born into the lineage of the celebrated king Charlemagne, mother Philosophy welcomed into her guild and taught the subtleties of her knowledge. She then directed you towards royal castles that you might shine in knightly armies, where you outdid your companions in audaciousness, swearing that you would terrorize your enemies and protect your own people under paternal auspices' (§4). In the chapter of Saint-George's, Oxford, where he lived and taught, 'master' Geoffrey of Monmouth mixed with Walter, archdeacon of the town, to whom he says, probably fictitiously, that he borrowed the old manuscript in Welsh which became his main source for his *History of the Kings of Britain*. Walter had previously lived in Notre-Dame of Warwick, a chapter founded by the Beaumonts, where he may have met Waleran.²⁶ The count of Meulan's Oxonian friends certainly match his interest in Latin texts.

²⁵ Crouch, *The Beaumont Twins*, 207–211.

²⁶ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 106–107.

Ranulph of Glanville (d. 1190) was chief justiciar of England from 1180 to 1189, a position of responsibility which Robert of Leicester had occupied a decade or so earlier. Unlike Leicester, Ranulph did not belong to the highest ranking aristocracy, being born into a Suffolk family of middle nobility. His family would certainly have maintained links with the higher aristocracy who would have been in a position to open the doors of the royal palace for them.²⁷ The young Ranulph may have taken part in the Second Crusade (1147–1149) and subsequently would seem to have begun a brilliant administrative career at the court of Stephen of Blois. In 1163, Henry II appointed him his *sheriff* or representative for the whole of Yorkshire. He quickly became the king's confidant and was placed at the head of the Exchequer and the Judiciary for the whole kingdom. His knowledge of English administrative machinery explains in part why the king entrusted him, from 1181 onwards, with the education of his younger son, King John, then fifteen years of age.²⁸ Parallel to all this Ranulph also led a military career, commanding the victorious English troops against the king of Scotland at Alnwick and also at the siege of Saint-Jean d'Acre, where he died.

As with Robert of Leicester, the chroniclers of the age hold Ranulph to be wise and educated. Several of them admire the rigour of his justice, his sense of organization regarding the courts, the attention that he brought to judicial procedure, and the finesse of his political thinking. They record that he wrote a long legal commentary in Latin entitled *Treatise on the Laws and Customs of the Realm of England* (1187–1189). Even if he did not write this work in its entirety, he certainly supervised its composition. We are less certain of his authorship of two other texts. The first is a report of an *Assembly of East Anglia*, between 1148 and 1153, confirming the jurisdiction of the Abbey of Saint Edmund's over its lands. The second is the *Conquest of Lisbon*, which describes the taking of the port of Lisbon in 1147 by the Anglo-Norman fleet, en route for the Holy Land. The arguments of scholars who plead for his authorship of these two texts are inconclusive since they are hardly based on the praises on members of Glanville family they contain.²⁹ Ranulph's mastery of Latin is undeniable, however. Without being a rhetorician capable of versifying, his knowledge allowed him to write reports and laws with perfect skill.

Two accounts, one by Walter Map (c. 1140–1209) and the other by his comrade and sometime plagiarist Gerald of Wales, both of whom were

²⁷ Mortimer, 'The family of Rannulf de Glanville'.

²⁸ Turner, *Eleanor of Aquitaine*, 240.

²⁹ Russell, 'Ranulf de Glanville'.

priests and courtiers of Henry II, describe Ranulph of Glanville conversing with the authors about knightly 'literacy'. In his *Courtiers' Trifles* (1181–1182), Walter claims to have spoken with Ranulph about the upward political mobility of serfs through education. According to Map, the nobles disdained letters which was absurd, because the 'liberal' arts were reserved to them by right, due to their 'free' (*liber*) status. But the serfs disagreed with this appraisal: 'They educate their children, not in order to remove them from vice, but to enrich them. The more they know, the more harmful they become; the arts are indeed the two-edged sword of the powerful and they use it in various ways: in the hands of a good prince they are an instrument for peace, but in the hands of a tyrant they become an instrument of death.' Walter finishes his discourse with a quote from Claudian, a Latin poet who lived in the early 400s: 'There is nothing more brutal than a peasant who has attained the higher echelons of power, nor anything more monstrous than the rage of a slave unleashed on the back of a free man'. In other words, once they reach the top of the political hierarchy, parvenus reveal themselves to be excessively severe towards those whom they rule over. Ranulph listened and acquiesced (I, 10). Walter was proud to have obtained the approbation of the king's most important minister, who considered, as he himself did, that the nobles did not sufficiently educate their sons in letters, contrary to the peasants who exploited knowledge for their own material success and to the detriment of those weaker than themselves. Culture was thereby diverted from what he considered to be its primary disinterested function of moral improvement, and more prosaically, of social distinction.

The theme of the unjustified promotion of the commoner through education is widespread throughout this historical period. It is not only a subject of conversation for the king's courtiers but is also one of the most commonly expressed viewpoints among the aristocracy. It was also expounded upon, at a lower social level, among the lower nobility who feared a possible fall from their status. At the beginning of 1286, Raymond de Baffignac, a former consul ('member of the town council') of Castres (in the Languedoc region), was summoned by the inquisitors of Albi whose clerk reported his discussion with another noble. As they were in dispute with the episcopal court for legal matters, they complained about the increased power of the clergy: 'Nowadays, knowledge prevails over nobility. The clergy have taken to exalting the possessors of knowledge, raising them to high office and leaving the nobles and the rest far behind. Indeed, the power of the clergy is now such that they leave no room for those who are not clerics, whereas in the past, the nobility were

certain to receive promotion and to occupy the functions that the clergy have annexed by subversion.³⁰

The historical context of this account is of course different to that of a discussion between an adviser of the king of England and a cleric at the king's court. For the former there was a background of anticlericalism which sometimes led to heresy, with the Languedoc lords refusing to pay tithes to the clergy. Impoverished by the dividing up of inheritances, they envied the ecclesiastical or civil offices monopolized by clerics who were born into social strata which were better served by the new economic circumstances. The enrichment of the merchant class, or of the wealthy farmers, led their members to provide their sons with an education which was inaccessible to the offspring of the less advantaged members of the nobility, who lived rather uncomfortably on their private income. Their circumstances were not at all the same as those of Ranulf de Glanville. His awareness of the fact that the evolving economic circumstances were beyond the control of all those actors involved may perhaps explain the moderate nature of Raymond de Baffignac's observations, which contrast with Walter Map's harsher opinions. Baffignac's moderation may also be imputed to his fear of displeasing the inquisitors or to the clerk's reformulation in bland administrative Latin of harsher words originally spoken in Occitan. Despite the varying formulations and contexts, the references to the good old days and the ravages due to the rise of the serfs through education to positions of power from which they abuse their authority are to be found equally among the courtiers of the king of England and with the consul of Castres. Disregarding historical time periods, the content of their discourse remains identical.

Letters and the aristocracy were also at the heart of a discussion between Gerald of Wales and Ranulph of Glanville ('a man who was both erudite and eloquent') as reported by Gerald in his *Education of a Prince*. Gerald asks Ranulph why the Normans defended their French dukedom so poorly after having united it with their English kingdom when they had initially obtained that dukedom through military struggle and subsequently—before their conquest of England—had defended it so well. In reply, Ranulph attributes the Normans' initial victories to the civil war between Louis the Pious and Gormond and, some years later, to the conflict triggered off by Raoul de Cambrai; he suggests that these struggles had taken a considerable toll among young people in France. Gerald put forward two different reasons for the Normans' subsequent loss of fight-

³⁰ Translation above: Biget, 'Les cathares devant les inquisiteurs', 238.

ing ability. The first of these was the 'insular tyranny' of the kings of England which deprived the Normans of their former liberty and hence, also, of their fighting spirit. The second reason he puts forward is the French appetite for knowledge. Indeed, Gerard argues, the association of education and war had previously provided a distinct military advantage for Greece at the time of Achilles and Alexander the Great, and also for the Romans at the time of Julius Caesar. The same association subsequently led to French victories under Pippin III the Short and the Carolingians (III, 12).

The conversation between the two men presents a chronological difficulty. The original starting point of their discussion, the question of the recent territorial losses of the dukedom of Normandy, is surprising. During Ranulph's lifetime, under the reign of Henry II, the Anglo-Normans had, contrary to what Gerald suggests, displayed crushing military superiority over the French. It was only at the very beginning of the thirteenth century, when Gerald wrote the afore-cited passage in his *Education of a Prince*, that Anglo-Norman superiority was radically challenged by the troops of Philip II Augustus (1180–1223). However, Ranulph had died at least a decade before this. Like Walter Map, whom he often imitated, Gerald sought to give more weight to his arguments by pretending to have subjected them to the approbation of the kingdom's most celebrated chief justiciar. In addition, Gerald's francophilia is directly proportionate to his disappointment with the Angevin kings, who consistently vetoed his election to the Welsh bishopric of Saint-David despite his services to their court. He also criticized them for the assassination of Thomas Becket (1170), which provoked a lasting scandal amongst the Anglo-Norman clergy, and also for the exile of another Archbishop of Canterbury, Stephen Langton, from 1205 onwards. In 1216, Gerald went as far as to take sides with the future king Louis VIII (1223–1226) who invaded England against King John (1199–1216), writing a long poem of welcome to the former. Regarding knowledge and education, Gerald had a similar admiration for French schools. Like many clerics of his generation, he fondly reminisces about his years he spent studying in Paris. In one of his letters (ep. 136) John of Salisbury, a contemporary and fellow countryman of Gerald's, makes a pun on the words 'paradise' and 'Paris', a city where he says the angels climb up and down from the heavens as on Jacob's Ladder. For his part, Gerald explains to Ranulph, the literate knight, how the Franks managed to unite knowledge and war, claiming that the synergism between these two, apparently disparate elements provided the Franks with military supremacy on the battlefield.

In the thirteenth century, the number of secular nobles who knew Latin most probably increased in England. While the regent of the kingdom, William Marshal (d. 1219), never learnt Latin, his second son, Richard, Lord of Longueville (d. 1234), is described by the chronicler Roger of Wendover (d. 1236), a monk at Saint Albans, as 'sufficiently educated in literary knowledge' (t. 3, p. 86). His third son Gilbert (d. 1241) was even better educated as he had been intended for the clergy before becoming a knight. The generational change to be observed in this family close to the court is significant. The continual development of royal administration and bureaucracy led to an increased need for specialists in writing. We have already mentioned the case of Paulin Piper (d. 1251), 'literary knight or military cleric', author of a Latin poem about Saint George and a member of Henry III's close entourage. He came from a considerably more modest family than the Beaumonts or even the Glanvilles and the Marshals and he increased his wealth essentially during the exercise of his functions. The case of Paulin Piper would therefore seem to suggest that the model of the knightly Latin scholar spread directly down from the high ranking aristocracy towards the lower nobility. Walter Map's disappointment at the old nobility's disdain for education should not be taken too literally, as it merely reflects a commonplace anti-plebeian theme.

The Italian educated nobility

There was not the same expanded spread of schools in the kingdom of Sicily, which at that time included the southern part of the Italian peninsula as well as the island of Sicily, as there was in communal northern Italy. The royal court of the kingdom would nevertheless appear to have been one of the most important literary centres of the time. In the twelfth century, access to the languages of culture was facilitated by the fact that there were still significant Greek and Arabic communities in Sicily. In addition to this, the new Norman kings attracted French poets. They maintained a solid bureaucracy of Byzantine-Arabic inspiration, while imposing Latin as the exclusive language of administrative documents. Several of their officers show themselves to have been significantly better educated than their ordinary tasks of government required. Maio of Bari (d. 1160), one of the great admirals of Sicily under Roger II (1105–1154) and William I (1154–1166), wrote an *Exposition of the Lord's Prayer*. His successor to high office, Henry Aristippus of Calabria (d. 1162), admittedly archdeacon of Catania and therefore not a lay person, adapted works

by Plato, Euclid, Aristotle, Hero, and Diogenes Laërtius from Greek into Latin. Eugenius of Palermo (c. 1130–1202), another important figure of Greek origin and also grand admiral from 1190 onwards, was equally active in translating Greek scientific and philosophical works. Around 1160, he translated into Latin an Arabic version of Ptolemy's *Optics*, and also helped a doctor from Salerno to translate the *Almagest* (also by Ptolemy on the basis of a Greek manuscript given to the king by the Emperor of Byzantium). The *History of the Kingdom of Sicily*, which describes events between 1154 and 1160, is also sometimes attributed to Eugenius, writing under the name Hugo Falcandus, who wrote likewise twenty-five poems in Greek. The linguistic and cultural pluralism at the Norman court in Sicily was remarkable.³¹

Elsewhere in Italy, lawyers who were less well-educated in Greek or Arabic science but who were trained in Latin rhetoric and Roman law occupied high-ranking administrative positions. Ugolino Gosia and Boncompagno da Signa, for example, left teaching positions in Bologna to govern the commune of Ancona. At the beginning of the twelfth century, the Milanese judges Oberto de Orto and Girardo Cagapisto were part of a team who composed several legislative texts which became part of the *Libri feudorum*, a compilation of feudal law widely disseminated in the Western Mediterranean. In the following generation, Anselmo de Orto the Second moved to Bologna to study law.³² Another lawyer at the same university, Roffredo de Benevento, decided to leave Bologna in 1215 to teach in Arezzo, a Ghibelline town which supported the Holy Roman Emperor, because he found the Guelphs and the school in Bologna excessively subject to the power of the Pope. Shortly afterwards, he entered the service of Emperor Frederick II (1197–1250), king of Sicily. He taught at Frederick's university in Naples and also worked in his entourage under the title 'professor of civil law, master and judge of the imperial court'. In this position he used all his legal training to strengthen the kingdom of Sicily, in accordance with the wishes of his new patron. In Frederick's court, Roffredo kept company with Riccardo da San Germano (d. 1243), the master notary of the kingdom. Originally from a village at the foot of Monte Cassino, Riccardo had been recommended to Frederick II by the abbot of the monastery where he had been educated. He was the author of a Latin chronicle describing events in Monte Cassino and in the southern part of Italy in general between 1189 and 1243. He also inserted his own

³¹ Roncaglia, 'Le corti medievale', 99–104; Varvaro, 'Il regno normanno-svevo', 86–88.

³² Classen, 'Res gestæ', 393–394.

poems into the chronicle.³³ Ugolino and Boncompagno remind us that the lawyer, Roffredo, and the historian, Riccardo, both used their knowledge to further the power of the king of Sicily, albeit with some minor differences of approach and style.

The most important of Frederick II's officers was Pietro della Vigna (c. 1190–1249), who had also been trained in Bologna and who rose to become the Emperor's closest assistant before falling tragically into disgrace. He was accused of treason and punished by being blinded which led him to commit suicide. He was probably the son of a municipal judge in Capua, a town reputed for its school of oratory. The king invited him to his court because of his skills in the written language. He employed him first in 1221 as a notary in his chancery and then as a judge in the high court before finally appointing him protonotary for the whole kingdom in 1243. He even made him his *logothete*, literally 'he who places words', the speaker on behalf of the Emperor who could then remain silent during his audiences, in accordance with the image of the majestic and sacred monarch. Peter was above all a rhetorician and poet who raised the sophistication of the *ars dictaminis* (the Latin technique of writing) to its height. His fast paced, emphatic, allusive, hermetic, and metaphoric style was admired by his contemporaries. He crafted the deeds, letters, and anti-Roman pamphlets which issued from the royal palace of Naples. His rhetorical skills thereby became a formidable and effective propaganda weapon in the service of the Emperor's chancery, able to compete successfully with the notary Latin of the papal Curia.

In addition to his rhetorical training, Pietro della Vigna had also had a solid legal education, thanks to which he probably had a hand in shaping the imposing body of legislation which was promulgated by Frederick II in 1231 and which is referred to as the *Constitutions of Melfi* or the *Liber Augustalis*. He also on occasion commanded the imperial troops and would therefore seem to have been a knight. Lastly, he organised the chancery, which he managed as a place of learning for youths who had already acquired a basic knowledge of law and Latin in the Italian schools. 'At the Imperial Court, rhetoric has breast-fed many excellent minds', Pietro wrote to a teenager he was attempting to persuade to come and work for him as a notary. In his view, the chancery was destined to be a nursery in which future administrators increased their knowledge, refined their writing, became familiar with the secrets of power, and absorbed the rules of good government. Their training

³³ Roncaglia, 'Le corti medievali', 130–132.

also had to meet the requirements of Frederick II's demanding program of state development, for they themselves would one day become the framework of that state.³⁴

Several Italian historians were also lay knights. One was Caffaro de Castrofino (1080–1166), admiral of the Genoese fleet and consul or member of the local council, who wrote a very early version of the *Genoese Annals* describing events between 1099 and 1166. The annals contain above all lists of the city's consuls, thereby perpetuating the ancient Roman custom of the *Fasti consulares*. Caffaro paid especial attention to the First Crusade, which he participated in while serving with the Genoese fleet: he describes this expedition in his *Liberation of the Cities of the Orient*, a short chronicle which he includes in his *Annals*. In 1152, during a ceremony, Caffaro solemnly handed the manuscript to the town consuls so that it itself might appear 'henceforth in the public records and that the victories of the City of Genoa might be known by the Genoese (t. 1, pp. 3–4)'. His *Annals* thereby bestowed an official role on the commune, a scribe being charged with the task of writing down each year the most remarkable events in the history of the town. This practice continued down to 1294.

There was an analogous situation in the rival town of Pisa. Also at the beginning of the twelfth century, the judge Bernardo Maragone wrote down, in his *Annals of Pisa*, the military campaigns of his town, his embassies, and the list of its consuls and other communal officials. His son Salem, who declared himself to be a specialist in Roman law, continued these annals until 1182. Further north, in Lombardy, the judges Ottone Morena (d. 1161), and his son Acerbo, consul and podesta of Lodi and both representatives of the Emperor, describe the conflict between 1153–1168 in the *Annals* of their town and in a *History of Frederick Barberossa*, whom they fervently supported. They fought alongside Barberossa against Milan, the neighboring and rival town of Lodi. In the following century, Rolandino of Padua (c. 1200–1276) also belonged to the category of laymen who composed a Latin chronicle for their district. After studying in Bologna with Boncompagno da Signa, he in turn became a teacher of grammar and rhetoric in his home town. In 1260, he began a *Chronicle of the Deeds of the March of Treviso*, in which he openly argued for the independence of his district against the imperial procurator Ezzelino III da Romano (1194–1259). In 1262, he gave a public reading of his book,

³⁴ Ibid., 139–140, Kantorowicz, 'L'Empereur Frédéric II', 278–285, Grevin, *Rhétorique du pouvoir*.

which was approved by the professors of the University of Padua. This recognition by the academic authorities, similar to the recognition of Caffaro's *Genoese Annals*, led to his work being adopted by the town, as they held it to be an accurate description. Written in consular milieux by lawyers, all these chronicles celebrate the military victories, prestigious alliances, and territorial expansion of their commune.³⁵ They also exalt the dominant oligarchy which monopolized its municipal powers. These documents became veritable 'monuments' (*moneo*, the Latin etymology of this word, retains the meaning of 'making one think of', or 'suggesting the memory of') that each town kept carefully in order to perpetuate its collective memory.

An increasing number of jurists, urban chroniclers, and more modest scribes and lay notaries began to write in Latin in the kingdom of Sicily and the communes of Northern Italy during the thirteenth century, and there is insufficient space here to provide an exhaustive list. But there were also Latin experts in the aristocratic milieux disconnected from local or royal power. In his *Chronicle*, the Franciscan friar Salimbene d'Adam (1221–1288) recalls his friend Guido, lord of Basinello, a small village in the region of Este, near to the convent of Monfalcone where they would sometimes meet. He was assassinated in 1286 during the civil war between various communes in Emilia. Salimbene describes him as a 'handsome, lettered (*litteratus*), and very spiritual man who was equipped with tremendous memory, exceptionally loquacious and eloquent, lively, amusing, broad-minded, very affable and benevolent, and a friend to the Minorites whom he covered with kind deeds (p. 899)'. In accordance with the conventions of the genre, the funeral elegy lists the virtues of the deceased. It is, however, of interest to note that at the very beginning of the list, just after the eulogy regarding his physical appearance, Salimbene remarks on his literacy (*litteratus*). His mastery of Latin is therefore mentioned before his intelligence, his memory, and his gift for speaking, which would all seem to derive from, or are at least partly imputable to his knowledge of Latin. As Salimbene sees it, knowledge of Latin does not superficially improve his friend's standing, elegance and wit, but provides a profound structure for a well-rounded and generous personality. In this instance Guido's 'literacy' is strongly emphasized by a Franciscan, who would have been well aware of his founder's warnings regarding the danger of lack of humility amongst those who study. In any case, his elegy

³⁵ Classen, '*Res gestæ*', 394–398, Bordone and Garofani, '*Les chroniqueurs italiens*', 174–175, 178.

may provide a reflection of the social positive perception of learning and therefore of the spread of learning among the rural aristocracy of communal Italy, who may have obtained such learning in the school of a nearby town.

Semi-literate laymen

The clerics generally considered most knights to have insufficient mastery of Latin. They therefore tend to minimize the knowledge of laymen, whose attainments they judge against the standards of their own daily use of Latin, whether liturgical, written or oral. Shortly after 1189, Gerald of Wales wrote an introduction to his *Conquest of Ireland*, which provides a Latin description of the invasion of the island by Henry II's Anglo-Norman knights intended for public reading. He says that he can predict the reaction of those who 'puckering up their noses with disgust and pouting their lips' will condemn his book for its poor rhetoric. They should not hold it against him that he 'wrote the book above all for laymen and princes with low levels of literacy in a style which is flat and simple, intending nothing other than to make it comprehensible for them', nor that he used popular vocabulary for the benefit of the wider multitude (p. 2). Twenty years or so later, in the new preface to the manuscript of the same book, which he dedicates to King John, Gerald appears even more disenchanting by lay ignorance, because he explicitly calls for a French translation. He even adds that Walter Map used to claim that while Latin might ensure the permanence of written works, it was less and less understood by the princes whose literacy and generosity had in recent times declined (pp. 264–265). When evaluating these two introductions, which are disparaging to say the least, the not insignificant degree of the ecclesiastical writers' haughty condescendence towards lay knowledge needs to be borne in mind.

Laicus is synonymous with *illitteratus*, or with *idiota* in Greek. The judgmental *topos* of the professional writers is partly objective, however. It would seem to be accurate as regards the knights who, whilst not excellent Latin scholars and sometimes even unable to read Latin at all, displayed an interest in reading and managed to obtain a certain degree of learning. In his *Chronicle*, William (d. 1184), archbishop of Tyre, praises Raymond of Poitiers (1136–1149), prince of Antioch, and provides an accurate reflection of the social and cultural type of the semi-literate warrior: 'Superior to his predecessors and to his successors in the handling of

weapons and in experience of military affairs, he developed his knowledge, despite the fact that he was illiterate' (XIV, 21). Another example may help to understand the apparent paradox in William of Tyre's statement. In his *Ancient Rhetoric* (1215), Boncompagno da Signa provides several model letters for various senders and addressees and accepts that plain style is more suitable for businessmen: 'In their letters, merchants do not require adorned style because they almost always write in their mother tongue or in the vernacular or in corrupt Latin' (6.13.3). Many of the Italian nobility were at that time involved in trade and Boncompagno's remark provides insight into their imperfect mastery of Latin which merely allows them to communicate effectively in unadorned style.

In 1143 or 1144, Gilbert Foliot (d. 1187), abbot of Gloucester, wrote to his 'very dear friend' Brian Fitz Count, Lord of Wallingford (Oxfordshire), the illegitimate child of Alan IV Fergant (1084–1112), duke of Brittany. His long letter begins as follows: 'Some people are amazed that you should have published a book despite the fact that you never learnt letters. I want you to know that there was nothing miraculous involved as far as I was concerned because I knew that the strength of your passion compensated for your lack of mastery.' According to Gilbert, Brian also carries deep affection for the deceased Henry I of England 'who took charge of you during your childhood, taught you during your youth, and, after having given you your knight's harness, showered you with gifts and lands.' It was precisely the gratitude with which he remembered the deceased king that made Gilbert decide to take sides with Empress Matilda of England, (who was the king's only living legitimate child and also his heiress) during the civil war following the succession crisis: 'In truth, you defend her and support her not only in arms but also through the beauty of eloquence, as we have heard and even seen' (ep. 26). The abbot of Gloucester would therefore appear to have read the manuscript of Brian's pamphlet which argued for Matilda's claim to the throne of England. Since he was also on Matilda's side, Gilbert praised the composition of this opusculum, and although it was dictated by a layman who had never been trained in Latin rhetoric, he considers the author's enthusiasm more than compensated for his lack of literary education. Devoid of any rhetorical artifice, the pamphlet undeniably possesses persuasive force.

Brian Fitz Count's book in support of Empress Matilda has been lost. Not so his *Memory*, however, which was copied in the epistolary collection of the bibliophile monk and bishop of Durham, Richard of Bury (1281–1345). The *Memory* is in fact a long letter dated 1142 in response to

Henry of Blois (d. 1171), bishop of Winchester and pontifical legate, who had enjoined Matilda to come to a reconciliation with his brother and her rival, King Stephen of Blois. Brian's whole argument is founded on his obligation to observe an order given earlier by Henry of Blois himself requiring him to take sides with Matilda. He discusses two passages from Genesis, on Adam's sin of disobedience and Lot's wife who was turned into a pillar of salt. He also mentions Pope Urban II's call for a Crusade and the names of several princes who heeded the call and accepted much sacrifice in order to protect pilgrims and to conquer Jerusalem. He himself lived a frugal life, since his lands and crops had been expropriated on the orders of his correspondent: 'It is therefore unsurprising that I take the property of others to support myself and my men,' he concludes. In addition, he quotes a long list of witnesses who were present when the bishop ordered him to follow the Empress. Lastly, he says he is prepared to defend her right in a legal duel or in front of a court. The style of the letter is plain and devoid of any rhetorical effect, thus revealing the illiteracy which Gilbert Foliot had already identified. His knowledge, which is of a biblical and historical nature, only allows Brian to discuss Genesis or to mention the First Crusade, which living survivors may have told him about. His knowledge certainly does not come from reading.

After his death in around 1150, Brian Fitz Count became a literary character thanks to Chrétien de Troyes. In his first Arthurian romance, *Erec and Enide* (1170–1176), the writer praises the peoples of the Plantagenet Empire, then governed by Henry II, son of Empress Matilda, and depicts the coronation of the two main protagonists in Nantes, a town occupied by the son of Matilda, Henry II from 1156–1159. For his romance, he invents the character of Brian of the Isles, of whom he says merely that he sent two thrones of artistically sculpted ivory and fine gold for the coronation of Erec and his wife. The action of his second romance, *Cligès* (1176–1180), mostly takes place in the valley of the middle Thames. It is, more specifically, close to Brian's domain in Wallingford that Chrétien places the tournament in which Cligès beats Perceval and Lancelot, thus making him known to Arthur's court. Even if Chrétien does not mention explicitly the historical Fitz Count, he suggests Brian's prestige, thanks to his loyalty to the Angevins, in the Plantagenet court which the writer may have visited around 1170, twenty or so years after Brian's death. In subsequent romances, however, the character of Brian of the Isles loses some of its aura. *Perlesvaus*, also called *Li Hauz Livres du Graal* ('The High History of the Holy Grail', 1200–1210), in particular, turns him into Arthur's arch-enemy, who had become his seneschal only

to betray him immediately.³⁶ Around the same period, the *Knight with Two Swords* describes him as a cowardly rival of Gawain's, being the favourite of the lady whom he courts to no avail. The author and the readership of these two romances perceive the character in a very negative light and no longer connect him with Brian Fitz Count who must progressively have faded away from memory.

The *History of the Counts of Guines* by Lambert of Ardres (1154–1206) provides an exceptionally rich source concerning the warrior aristocracy of the twelfth century. Written between 1201 and 1206, it follows the genealogy and history of a Flemish family line over two centuries, concentrating more particularly on Baldwin II of Guines (d. 1205) and on his eldest son Arnold II (d. 1220), with whom Master Lambert, their chaplain and also a distant relative, was well acquainted. Lambert knew that Baldwin II was 'wholly secular and illiterate and totally ignorant of the liberal arts'. But he also recognized that he was possessed of an exceptional aural memory and eloquence which allowed him to interpret biblical texts not only literally but also from a mystical and spiritual approach. That was why the 'semi-literate' Baldwin II was able to engage in lively theological and scriptural debate with clerics who were 'more erudite than he on futile matters' in which he was never short of arguments. In exchange for their teaching, he told them 'secular stories that he learnt from storytellers'. Those who knew him were all lost in admiration: 'How does he know of letters, when nobody taught him?' According to Lambert of Ardres, Baldwin was famed for his intellectual curiosity. He asked several scholars to translate various texts into French: the annotated *Song of Songs*; the Sunday Gospels with their respective sermons; a *Life of Saint Anthony* by an unknown Alfred; Solinus's *Natural History*; and a medical treatise. 'The copying of these books enhanced his learning so early on and to such an extent that he was compared to Augustine in theology, to Dionysius the Areopagite in philosophy, to the storyteller Thales of Miletus for his pagan fables, and to the most well-known minstrels for his epic songs, noble adventures, and common fabliaux.' He entrusted the care of his library to Hasard of Aldehem, a layman in his entourage, who acquired a wide culture from reading its books translated into French. Baldwin also encouraged a local intellectual, Gautier Silen, to write his *Book of Silence*, providing him in return with horses, clothes, and other gifts (§80–81).

Lambert of Ardres' description of his lord provides a perfect illustration of the mental universe of a noble of average learning. His descrip-

³⁶ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 184, 390–391, 470.

tion of Baldwin II's knowledge appears contradictory. He describes him as an *illitteratus*, a layman who has never had the opportunity to study liberal arts at school but who becomes, more positively, a *quasi litteratus* through his capacity to assimilate the teachings of the clerics and to listen to readings of the classics, as long as they are translated into the vernacular, since he has no Latin and is unable to read. But his listening allows him to overcome this handicap. He also displays an innate talent for speaking and participates comfortably and eagerly in scholastic disputes. In clerical circles, he brings tales and songs learnt from minstrel performances during fêtes, banquets, and evening gatherings that the ecclesiastical masters do not deign to attend. He thereby became an intermediary between, on the one hand, poetic fiction in romance, which he was able to render in the appropriate style (epic stories, adventure romances, and folk tales), and, on the other hand, the scholastic speculation of specialists in knowledge and learning. Since the written word was closed to him, he used his voice to create a 'literary' sociability in which his empathy, and also his patronage, earned him the respect and admiration of intellectuals. In the final analysis, the phenomenon of semi-literate Baldwin refutes any theory which suggests a hermetic barrier between the written and the spoken word, between Latin and the vernacular, between the cleric and the layman, or between the sacred and the profane. As a mediator between two different cultural worlds, Baldwin II possessed learning and knowledge from both.

Twelfth-century texts provide other examples of knights who, whilst not illiterate, do not have full mastery of reading or writing. Walter Map is proud of the education of a young male relative who is receptive to any information he hears and to adult advice, who is diligent and always busy. He adds: 'Despite the fact that he was not literate, much to my regret, nevertheless he was able to write a series of letters.' Shortly before the age of twenty, the young man left England to receive instruction in arms from Philip (1168–1191), count of Flanders (IV, prologue). Since Walter mentions him no further after this, it would seem that his young relative's pursuance of military activities prevented him from continuing his learning of letters. Such incomplete mastery is evident in the habits of Évrard, count of Breteuil-sur-Noye (Picardy), as described by Gilbert of Nogent. He always carried a small notebook with him, in which he collected autographs in prose or in verse written by the most well-known men of letters. 'He was, however, unable to understand the full meaning of these autographs by himself. He therefore handed them to those who were able to clearly explain them to him, that they might inform him which of these

autographs were the most successful in terms of meaning or in terms of poetic organization' (I, 9). The interest in writing displayed by Walter Map's young relative and also by Évrard de Breteuil is similar to that of Baldwin II, count of Guînes. Walter's relative also learnt the fundamental skills of writing and the two others displayed a great fascination for books and also an equal respect for the clergy, if we are to believe the evidence provided by two of its members.

The knights' knowledge of Latin improved in the course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. It even became common for knights to be able to understand, if not literary and scholastic works, then at least shorter and more stereotyped legal documents. Evidence for this change may perhaps be provided by the way the cleric Wace modifies the portrait of Duke Richard I of Normandy. In his *Roman de Rou*, which was written in French verse around 1165, Wace modifies the description initially provided by the chronicler Dudon of Saint-Quentin around the year 1000. In place of a sentence in which Dudon praises the prince's religious training, Wace writes: 'He could read a charter and distinguish its various parts' (I, 2, l. 1765–1766). Evidence borrowed directly from the drawing up of deeds provides clearer support for the theory of a certain degree of progress in aristocratic literacy. In Catalonia in the eleventh century, the majority of the nobility simply append four dots, as a signature or subscription, around a cross drawn by the scribe. In 1077, a notary describes this practice as 'a habit of laymen' (*mos laicorum*). This has changed by the twelfth century when almost all the nobility know how to write their name, preferably in romance rather than in Latin but even, in the case of some of the members of the house of the viscount of Barcelona who had become mercenaries in the service of the Almoravides, in Arabic.³⁷ Lastly, several English charters and letters which were drawn up at the end of the twelfth century and which dealt not with ecclesiastical questions but with feudal or property issues are characterized by their clumsy Latin. Historians attribute these documents to laymen who must have dictated their wishes to scribes in macaronic Latin.³⁸

There is one exceptional document concerning laymen literacy. In 1258, Simon de Montfort, sixth earl of Leicester, dictated his will to his eldest son Henry who wrote the will down on parchment. Admittedly, the language of the will is French and not Latin. The regularity and strength of Henry's sentences demonstrate clearly that he was well practised in

³⁷ Zimmermann, *Écrire et lire*, 92, 103, 107–10.

³⁸ Richardson and Sayles, *The Governance of Mediaeval England*, 275–277.

writing.³⁹ Both Simon and Henry, leaders of the baronial revolt against King Henry III, perished in the battle of Evesham in 1265. Simon's two other sons, Gui and Simon, would appear to have been interested in Arthurian literature. Following the confiscation of their lands by the king of England and their exile, they again met in Tuscany, where they probably made the acquaintance of Rusticello da Pisa. Around 1270, Rusticello compiled and adapted a long prose version of *Tristan* in French, giving his protagonist the Montfort arms which depicted a silver lion rampant.⁴⁰ The heraldic flattery aimed at his potential readers, Gui and Simon de Montfort, would therefore correspond to their interest for literature. Their culture may match with the calligraphic skills of their brother Henry.

Even if a definite spread of literacy can be sensed amongst the nobility in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, this development must not be overstated. In 1270, Jean de Nanteuil, chamberlain of the king of France, did not add his subscription to the will of Jeanne, countess of Toulouse, for whom he was a witness. He merely appended his seal, whilst a canon stood in for him in signing the will since Jean himself 'does not know letters'.⁴¹ During the same period, the notaries of Provence begin the practice of translating orally, into the vernacular, the deeds they draw up in Latin, for the benefit of the contracting parties who are present. To avoid any subsequent dispute based on misunderstanding, they expressly mention in the document that they have provided such oral translation. These formulations are worded as follows: 'stated in the mother tongue', 'read and explained in the mother tongue', and, even more explicitly, 'explained in the lay tongue' or 'read in the vernacular'.⁴² Jean de Nanteuil's ignorance, together with the above use of the Romance language in Provençal business affairs, may perhaps qualify the assumption of a more widespread use of Latin and of reading and writing among the western nobility towards the beginning of the fourteenth century. However, nor do they disprove it. Increased literacy provided most knights with the ability to read and understand, at least in general terms, a contract, a royal summons, or a legislative document. This increases their legal knowledge, improves their oral performance, and refines their arguments, all of which

³⁹ An edition and a facsimile of this will are in Beaumont, *Simon de Montfort* (ed. 1930), app. A1, 276–278, pl. VIII.

⁴⁰ Girbea, 'Flatteries héraldiques', 368–369.

⁴¹ *Histoire générale de Languedoc*, t. 8, col. 1703, n° 535 (23 VI 1270).

⁴² *Actes de la famille Porcelet*, 393, n° 456 (3 IV 1275), 430, n° 492 (16 III 1289), 461, n° 531 (15 XI 1293), 502, n° 564 (27 II 1305).

are of great value for debating in parliament or in court, while also rendering them more competent to undertake administrative tasks in the service of the prince.

The new bureaucracy could not function without men of letters, who were usually recruited from among the clergy. But tonsured intellectuals did not always accept governmental responsibilities gracefully. At the end of the twelfth century, in England, some of them bitterly criticize the royal court which, they claim, imposes boring tasks and exhausting journeys upon them. This, they say, wastes precious time properly reserved for study and contemplation, and, if they are priests, for pastoral ministry, all of these being higher pursuits. They assert, above all, that these administrative duties are soulless activities. The court appears to them to be a place of debauchery, where vice and pleasure co-exist with hellish torture. Peter of Blois (d. 1211) and Walter Map, who were so active in the government of Henry II, even compare the court to the ‘mesnie Hellequin’, a horde of wretched ghosts expiating their sins between the next world and the underworld.⁴³ These clerical grievances contain a considerable dose of rhetoric: *Exeat aula qui vult esse pius* (‘He who would remain right should leave court!’), exclaimed Lucan, the nephew of Seneca. The intellectuals may bemoan their lot but they almost never gave up their administrative positions in order to go back to a parish, a school, or a cloister. They preferred to remain at court that provided power and a source of income.

The complaints of the clerics nevertheless indicate a certain uneasiness or even a crisis of conscience. At least two theologians in the Parisian schools, Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) and Cardinal Robert de Courson (d. 1218), remark that any tonsured cleric involved in government might risk taking part, even indirectly, in the corporal punishments inflicted upon lawbreakers. Yet canon law strictly forbade them from being involved in bloodshed, which was considered unbecoming to holy orders. The two theologians therefore requested that such tasks be entrusted exclusively to laymen. Pope Innocent III (1160–1216) confirmed the rightness of their position by a decree of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).⁴⁴ Since at least the so-called Gregorian Reform, the Church had confined the clergy and the laity to their respective fields of action.

To return to the court of Henry II, a recent count of the most frequently cited witnesses in the 3,200 charters of the king reveals eighty laymen as

⁴³ Türk, *Nugæ curialium*; Aurell, *L'Empire des Plantagenêt*, 35–36, 71–80.

⁴⁴ Baldwin, *Paris, 1200*, 187–188.

against thirty-six clerics. It is true that there is a more balanced proportion among the inner circle of his ten most intimate advisers: apart from Thomas Becket (d. 1170), who was dominant until 1162 when he left the court, there were three other clerics.⁴⁵ These figures are of course difficult to interpret precisely, and yet they would seem to confirm the greater influence of laymen in the king's decision-making. Moreover, knights also exercised the coercive power of royalty through arms, the bearing of which was forbidden for the clergy. The prestige of the sword, the symbol of justice which establishes peace on earth, was reserved for the chivalric class. According to the doctrine of the two swords, dear to twelfth-century intellectuals, the clerics punished only by excommunication, which, while it may not kill the body, nevertheless condemns the soul to eternal damnation. But anathema is not the prerogative of the secular power, which requires educated knights for government but also, and above all, to wage war and to establish order through the use of arms as and when necessary.

The literary culture required of laymen—even of courtiers, officers, or bailiffs of the prince—was not inordinate. Indeed, the case could hardly be otherwise for knights who were busy with training for combat, policing activities, military campaigns, the exercise of justice, levying of taxes, and other time-consuming tasks. Their knowledge is described by Michael T. Clanchy as 'pragmatic literacy', sufficient for royal administration, estate management, and business affairs.⁴⁶ Clanchy minimizes the disinterested nature of such learning as against considerations of efficiency and self-interest. He insists thus on the negligible role of *belles lettres* ('fine literature'). Whilst this view would appear to be supported statistically, it needs to be qualified by pointing out the literary contribution of certain knights who were particularly well-educated.

Book collectors and patrons

At the end of the twelfth century, Baldwin II, count of Guînes, paid a group of clerics to translate the Bible and its commentaries, the lives of the saints, and certain works of scientific popularization. At the time, building up a library was a relatively widespread pursuit in princely homes. Henry I of Champagne, known as 'the Liberal' (1152-1181), and his wife Mary of France (d. 1198) ordered certain of the notaries in their

⁴⁵ Vincent, 'The Court of Henry II', 288-293.

⁴⁶ *From Memory to Written Record*, 246-251, 328-334.

chancery to copy for them the Latin manuscripts of the monasteries in their principality. They also played the role of literary patrons, surrounding themselves with scholars, writers, and poets who wrote on their behalf. Most notably, they granted a canonical prebend to Chrétien de Troyes, who dedicated his *Knight of the Cart* (1177–1181) to the countess. The former adds that the latter imposed him, a cleric, the frivolous topic of Lancelot and Guinevere's adulterous love. The cleric Evrat, also a *præbendarius* thanks to the pair's generosity, translated the book of Genesis into verse for Mary. In the dedication, he alludes to her library (*armaire*), where she will be able to read his translation.⁴⁷ Also at the end of the twelfth century, the brothers Baldwin III (1143–1162) and Amalric I (1162–1174), kings of Jerusalem, reveal an equally strong predilection for reading. In his *Chronicle*, their protégé, William of Tyre, writes: 'Baldwin was perfectly literate and his brother Almaric, who succeeded him, even more so. As soon as he could lay aside his public duties for leisure activities, he took delight in reading. He particularly enjoyed listening to stories, diligently seeking to familiarize himself with the acts and customs of ancient kings and the most accomplished princes. He found the fictional works of clerics and the wisest laymen even more entertaining' (XVI, 2). Admittedly, William does not explicitly mention any library of the kings of Jerusalem, but the existence of such may be deduced from their manifest love of reading.

Other nobles of lower rank than kings or counts also possessed books. The poet and writer Hue de Rotelande (perhaps Rhuddlan, in north Wales) dedicated his *Protheselaus*, written in French octosyllables, to Gilbert Fitz Baderon (d. 1191), a member of the family of the earls of Clare, and Norman lord of the Welsh town of Monmouth. Hue claimed to own the house in which he wrote, which was around thirty miles away in Credenhill (Herefordshire). He boasts not only of the nobility, bonhomie, and generosity of his patron but also about Gilbert's collection of books in Latin and French. He even claims to have translated his *Protheselaus* (l. 12700–12710) from a book in Gilbert's collection, which describes the adventures of the younger son of the duke of Apulia, who wandered as a knight from Italy to Burgundy. The ancient manuscript which provided his inspiration may be no more than a literary invention, but the existence of Gilbert's library is all the more certain since Hue's dedication of the book to Gilbert, and the very credibility of his romance, would have suffered if the flattery was of a clearly false nature.

⁴⁷ Benton, 'The Court of Champagne'; Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 254–256, 280–281.

At the time, the spread of manuscripts among Anglo-Norman knights is convincingly attested thanks to the epilogue which concludes Geoffrey Gaimar's *Estoire des Engles* (1135–1138), the first historiographical book in French. The writer claims to have written the book over the course of more than a year for Constance, the wife of Raoul Fitz Gilbert, a lord of the middle nobility from Lincolnshire and Hampshire. Gaimar adds that he was able to lay hand on numerous books in Anglo-Saxon, French, and Latin (probably through his lay patrons). He says that Constance helped him, in particular, to obtain a copy of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* that Walter Espec (d. 1147–1158), another lord from the north of England, kept in his castle in Helmsley (Yorkshire). Walter, in turn, had obtained the book on loan from Robert of Gloucester (c. 1090–1147).⁴⁸ And it was to Robert that Geoffrey of Monmouth dedicated the first version of his book. Robert was the illegitimate son of Henry I and also the leading supporter of his half-sister Matilda during the civil war. Robert's wealth would appear to have made him the leading figure of a literary circle which benefited from his library and from the books which he ordered. He was also the main dedicatee of the works of William of Malmesbury. In the epilogue to his *History of the English Kings*, the historian is full of admiration for the fact that Robert managed to find a few hours each day to read, or to be read to, despite his heavy workload: 'Letters will never suffer delay because of your knighthood, nor your knighthood because of letters' (§447).

Such praise is sufficiently representative of the period to have become a truism which could also be applied to Walter Espec, another member of Constance's literary 'salon'. Walter owed much of his wealth to the generosity of Henry I whom he had loyally served. After the king's death and shortly before retiring to the Augustinian Priory of Kirkham, which he had founded in 1122 on his own lands, Walter commanded the northern English troops against Scotland at the Battle of the Standard (1138). Ailred of Rievaulx, who was a monk of the Cistercian Abbey that Walter also founded on his lands in 1132, wrote a short description of his victory, in which he also mentioned, in passing, Walter's generosity towards the Cistercian order (p. 184). Before battle, Ailred says, Walter climbed up on the platform where the king of England's standard was flying and delivered a long harangue 'with his easy eloquence and his majestic voice' (p. 183).⁴⁹ After the battle, a crowd of

⁴⁸ Short, 'Gaimar's Epilogue'.

⁴⁹ Storelli, 'Les harangues de la bataille de l'Étendard (1938)'.

victors surrounded him 'because they venerated him as their leader and father' (p. 198). According to Ailred, the *captatio benevolentiae* of Walter's harangue indicated that he was both an accomplished knight and a man of letters. He began by reminding the younger knights of the experience conferred upon him by age. Then he cried out: 'I could quite freely have held my tongue, stayed in bed, rolled dice, or played chess, or, since such pastimes no longer suit my ripe old age, have given myself up to study, reading history, or in accordance with my habits, spend even more time listening to the person who tells me stories of ancient deeds' (p. 185). The speech which followed recalled the past victories of the Normans, thus confirming his penchant for history. The final victory was the fruit of his courage but also of his experience and of his readings on the heroic deeds of the past, in accordance with the literary *topos* of *fortitudo* and *sapientia*. It might be added that Ailred, like Walter, knew the legend of Arthur but probably via a less bookish route than Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Histoire*. In his *Mirror of Charity* (1141–1142), Ailred describes how one of his novices was angry at himself for having shed more tears over 'the fables of ignorant people concerning Arthur' (II, 17, §51), which he had listened to in a worldly context, than over the sermons and pious stories that were read or sung in the convent. The novice's monastic disdain towards lay fiction would not appear to have been in keeping with the tastes of the protector of his monastery.

Books were passed on from one person to another within the Anglo-Norman aristocracy who preferred the vernacular to Latin. Reading would appear to have been common practice to them. In the light of the *Estoire des Engles* ('History of the English'), Constance played the role equally as benevolent patron, scholar, and cultural intermediary. Indeed, Gaimar writes that she bought, for one mark of silver, the illuminated and musically scored manuscript of *The Life of King Henry I* by David (an otherwise unknown author to the moderns). He adds that 'she often reads in her chamber' (l. 6490), probably accompanied by a few other literary enthusiasts. In fact, at the beginning of the twelfth century, there was in England a literary coterie of educated knights who, along with their wives, promoted secular historiography and literature. They request, more specifically, adaptations into French (the elite language of the conquerors of the British Isles) of Latin or Anglo-Saxon works, which they would read out loud in 'the ladies' chambers'. They also lent each other books, which in those days were extremely expensive.

The manuscripts still preserved today from the libraries of the nobility (other than royal or princely libraries) are of a relatively late date since

they originate from the thirteenth century at the very earliest. They are often in the form of anthologies, containing passages from works in the vernacular within a single volume but also sometimes extending to several complete books. Inside each *codex*, the works are usually, but not always, presented in chronological or thematic order. Written between 1225 and 1250, manuscript 354 of the Berne Burgerbibliothek contains seventy-seven items, most of them romances (*The Story of the Grail*, *Roman des sept sages de Rome*, *Folie Tristan*), as well as educational works and satirical poems. This manuscript therefore belongs to the diversified type of collection whose function was to provide written distribution of an assortment of works rather than individual copies of each text. This type of collection was for a long time erroneously called a 'minstrel manuscript'. Present-day research tends to consider that this type of manuscript, rather than being intended for professional use, was instead compiled for the libraries of the nobility.⁵⁰ The minstrels themselves were not wealthy enough to commission such volumes which would also have been difficult for them to transport as they moved around. They would have made do with a few notebooks or loose sheets containing the songs, stories, or epics that they would present in the courts they visited (where they might also have found expensive copies of the same romances that they performed).

Surviving anthologies which were intended for use by the nobility became much more numerous from 1270 onwards. One example is the Digby manuscript preserved in the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford. This manuscript was written around 1272–1282 for Richard de Grimhill, a lowly noble from Worcestershire. It contains three categories of works written in both French and Latin: religious works (Latin prayers and psalms, but also Decalogues and creeds in the vernacular); practical works (on interpreting dreams, the calculation of the calendar, medical advice, falconry); stories and songs which were nearly always in French, but sometimes only in Middle English (lives and miracles of the saints, animal fables, and fabliaux).⁵¹

There are also several extant catalogues of twelfth- and thirteenth-century libraries, such as the list of the 113 volumes belonging to Philippe d'Harcourt (d. 1163), bishop of Bayeux. Robert de Torigni (d. 1186), prior of the Monastery of Bec and legatee of Philippe, provides an inventory which he places at the beginning of his *Chronicle*. Equally valuable is the list of the 264 books of the abbey of Saint-Victor in Marseille which was

⁵⁰ Collet, 'Du "manuscrit de jongleur"', 485, 488.

⁵¹ Orme, *Medieval Children*, 276–277.

drawn up during the abbacy of Mainier (1196–1204).⁵² Many similar examples could be given of catalogues of works belonging to clerics, cathedral chapters, or monasteries. It is a different story, however, for lay collections. It is only by the 1300s that lists of manuscripts belonging to nobles are to be found in a few wills, especially in Flanders. Most of the nobles concerned are very high-ranking holders of viscounties or counties: Raoul de Nesle (d. 1302), in Picardy; Constable of France; Jean d'Avesnes (d. 1304), count of Hainaut; Gui de Dampierre (d. c. 1305), count of Flanders; Héloïse de Joinville (d. 1312), viscountess of Vesoul (Franche-Comté); Robert de Béthune (d. 1322), count of Flanders; or Geoffroi de Naast (d. 1337), in Hainaut. Slightly later, a list of the forty-six volumes of the library of the castle of Ferté-en-Ponthieu mentions the loan of a *Life of Saint Martin*, in French, and the encyclopaedia *Secret of Secrets* in Latin, to a young lady of the house, and also the loan of Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Trésor* ('Books of treasure', a French encyclopaedia) to Jean de Pequigni, a local lord by then deceased. From the manuscripts which have survived to this day, it is also possible to identify the contents of the collection of twenty-three volumes in the possession of Mahaut, countess of Artois, in 1329.⁵³

The collections differ considerably in terms of size. The half a dozen or so devotional books belonging to the viscountess of Vesoul are not on the same scale as the twenty-five volumes in the collections of Jean d'Avesnes or Geoffroi de Naast, not to mention the forty or so works at Ferté-en-Ponthieu or the forty-six works belonging to Raoul de Nesle. The language also varies, Latin being overrepresented because of the high proportion of religious works. It is also difficult to distinguish the various proportions in terms of thematic content. Books of hours, psalters, and missals were essential for daily prayers and for following the liturgy in the castle chapel and so make up a very high proportion of works in all the lists. The same is true of the Bible which is often accompanied by commentaries and homilies. The lives of the saints and books of miracles likewise belong to the category of religious works, as do most of the moral works, mirrors for princes, and other instructional books, even if certain pagan sages, such as Cato, were still popular.

Historical works, whether written in Latin or in French, were also well represented in the libraries of the nobility. History was supposed to teach

⁵²Nebbiai, ed., *La Bibliothèque de l'abbaye de Saint-Victor*, 145–151.

⁵³Hasenohr, 'L'essor des bibliothèques privées', 330–337; Van Coolputs-Storms, 'Entre Flandre et Hainaut'; Beaurepaire, 'Bibliothèque du château de La Ferté'.

the nobles to conduct their affairs after the model of the great men of antiquity. The book owners followed the advice given by Otto of Freising at the beginning of his *Chronicle* to his nephew Frederick I Barbarossa: 'You must know the former deeds of kings and emperors in order to improve public life not only through the protection of arms but also through the reform of laws and through justice' (p. 1). According to the *Annals of Stederburg*, written by Gerald (d. 1209), provost of Riechenberg, Henry the Lion, duke of Saxony and Bavaria, was fascinated by history. Gerard insists on the benefits of Henry's passion for it. Indeed, in his old age the illness and weakness which affected the duke are compensated for 'by the nobility with which he ruled the natural force of his spirit'. By this Gerard means the tenacious efforts by which Henry maintained his intellectual faculties despite his advanced age. He also adds just after this: 'He ordered that all the chronicle manuscripts be collected, copied, and read to him; he spent entire nights listening to these readings at the expense of his sleep' (p. 230). Henry the Liberal, count of Champagne, also sought out history books, finding twenty or so of the classics, including Quintus Curtius, Livy, Valerius Maximus, Aulus Gellius, Freculphe of Lisieux, Flavius Josephus, and so on.⁵⁴ French chronicles on recent history were also preserved.

Other works in aristocratic libraries, for the most part in the vernacular, were devoted to popular science, encyclopaedic knowledge, geographical descriptions, and medical practice. The great classics of military strategy also occupied a certain amount of space in these libraries. In his *History* of Geoffrey Plantagenet of Anjou, John of Marmoutier describes how the count, whom he considers to be the most lettered of warrior leaders, took a castle by using a bomb fire in accordance with instructions provided in Vegetius's *De Re Militari* ('The Military Institutions of the Romans'), which Geoffrey read during the campaign (p. 218). Lastly, literary fiction in French is also represented in these libraries, often including romances set in antiquity and chivalric romances which transmit the high ideal of the warrior to their readership. The proportion of translations into the vernacular and the relative scarcity of legal or theological works reflect a different cultural background to that of the scholastic clerics.

The possessing of manuscripts would certainly seem to indicate an interest in culture, which is evidenced by the material state of some manuscripts written on poor quality paper and in untidy handwriting, and also by the worn state of some folios. Yet the aristocratic library was definitely

⁵⁴ Stirnemann, 'Les bibliothèques princières', 226–228.

an exterior sign of wealth during the Middle Ages. Indeed, the lord would proudly present his grandest books on a lectern in one of the most prestigious rooms of his palace which would be open to other aristocrats. Bound in a cover inlaid with precious stones, the white vellum folios presented calligraphic writing in two or three columns; each chapter began with coloured initials, while historiated miniatures, carefully executed in variegated colours, embellished the whole work. A grand library conferred prestige and distinction to its owner. It was only in the 1360s, however, in the *De Remediis Utriusque Fortunæ* ('Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul') written by Petrarch (1304-1374), that there was a criticism of this form of pride or 'jactitation' which led some to collect manuscripts in order to display them to the eyes of all. Petrarch adds that an abundance of books devoured without discernment or moderation does not imply a great depth of knowledge, recommending instead to assimilate the best works. Many of these manuscripts also contain mistakes, he says, due either to their author or to the copying scribe. Some of them may also be immoral. To conclude, Petrarch considers that it is the spirit rather than the book which should contain all knowledge, eloquence, and morals, all of which become useless if they serve only to cover the walls of a library. It is necessary therefore 'to learn books rather than to possess them, to entrust them to memory rather than to a library, and to lock them up in the mind rather than in a bookcase' (I, 43).

Despite being voiced by the first of the humanists, this idea of interiorization of knowledge and personal progress through reading was not new. It originated in antiquity. Medieval monks and clerics had never forgotten this ancient notion, even if they were incapable of formulating it with the same clarity as Petrarch. The disinterested pursuit of knowledge, a penchant for belles-lettres, and a belief in the improvement of man through books were also shared by the 'literate' knights. Their libraries may perhaps have sought to achieve a subtle form of distinction and to obtain the esteem of their peers, nevertheless they served to satisfy such vanity only in passing, thereby revealing that reading and writing were highly thought of in an aristocratic world which was fascinated with learning. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the penchant of the aristocratic knights for belles-lettres is undeniable.

Knighthood and Literary Creation

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the number of songs, romances, and treatises attributed to secular authors increased exponentially. In the context, the sudden emergence of lettered knights and scholarly ladies on the Western literary scene of that period may appear surprisingly rapid. And yet it was not a spontaneous development, since that emergence had been in preparation from the beginning of the scholastic renaissance. Increased schooling in reading and writing for the children of the nobility logically led them towards greater mastery of literary techniques. With the constant comings and goings of the castles' private tutors, teaching chaplains, and parish masters even in remote rural areas, knowledge became concentrated in the courts. From the rural margins to the urban centres, the courts attracted scholars and men of letters. The more educated clerics and knights were required for the daily running of the courts, but also to maintain a certain level of learning and education which lent a degree of prestige to the princes and lords who fostered letters and arts. To a greater extent than ever in the past, the terms *curia* ('court') and *schola* ('school') became synonymous in texts from that period. A cultural scene developed in the princely courts and in the lords' castles, but also in the more modest fortified manor houses of the squires. The numerous secular protagonists in this intellectual movement used the vernacular in preference to ecclesiastical Latin. They transmitted their works more often through voice than through writing, the latter having maintained distinctly sacred and clerical associations. The authors of this oral tradition would often present their works first of all at various small-scale cultural meetings, evening gatherings, and salons, before submitting them to the male and female writers of the secular aristocracy and the minstrels who interpreted their works.

THE COURT AND LITERARY SOCIAL LIFE

In the thirteenth century, several troubadours complain in their Occitan songs about the corruption of the courts which, they claim, are no longer run by generous and open-minded lords, as in days gone by. In the 1,767 lines of his *Abril issi' e mays intrava* (c. 1210), Raimon Vidal de Besalú provides a nostalgic evocation of the princes and palaces of southern France and the Iberian Peninsula that he had previously frequented. In contrast, he writes, 'we have lost our noble hearts and become cowards, while no one provides generous hospitality any longer' (l. 527–31). He asserts that the minstrels now ignore their trade and offer up, instead, cold and stupid facts (l. 958–61). Bertran de Born (d. 1215) also complains, as follows: 'Nobody knows how to love any more, how to run a court, how to serve ladies, or how to give generously' (XXX, l. 31–32). The two poets state that the atmosphere in the courts has become unbearable. Corruption is rife than ever. Aimeric de Peguilhan is quite disgusted by the northern Italian courts around 1210–1220: 'The number of lunatics, pederasts, and minions is overly increasing, and I find this most unpleasant' (XXXII, l. 1–2).

To be sure, the troubadours' recriminations against the courts in the years around 1200 include a significant ingredient of unjustified nostalgia, outdated rhetoric, and commonplaces borrowed from the classics. They also provide a secular counterpart to complaints by contemporary clerics against the allegedly unbearable milieu that had developed in the princely palaces. In the hands of the secular troubadour writers, however, such complaints reveal subtle variations when compared with the Classical recriminations and clerical remonstrations. Thus in the year 1220, Falquet de Romans regrets the change in Frederick II, who had earlier welcomed him to his court. Falquet claims that since his recent imperial coronation what the king has gained in power he has lost in generosity: 'Now his pleasure is merely to obtain lands and money' (VI, l. 24–25). Historians sometimes read these lines as recrimination against the increased bureaucracy of princely courts where the former courtiers, poets, and other literary enthusiasts have become mere scribblers.¹

Had celebrating ended then at the court of the king of Sicily, in favour of bureaucracy and administration? Such an interpretation would appear to be too extreme: by focussing on the development of institutions, it probably neglects the central role of prodigality in the value system of the knights and the troubadours, for whom hoarding was the deadliest of

¹ Scaglione, *Knights at Court*, 98.

sins.² An explanation based on the administrative context of the thirteenth century does nonetheless tally with Boniface de Castellane's bitter songs which rail against the trials, reports, and inquests conducted by the officers of the count of Provence to the detriment of Castellane's estate. This interpretation also provides an essential dialectic opposing two types of writing at the same courts (which remain both places of bureaucracy and places of leisure): 'practical literature', on the one hand, and 'belles-lettres', on the other. We have already mentioned the rhetorical and legal studies which equipped many knights with the tools necessary to keep the administrative wheels turning in princely offices.

Castles transformed into palaces

In the Middle Ages, literary composition was perhaps preceded by the author engaging in silent and solitary thought and writing. It should be borne in mind, however, that this almost always led to public presentation. Literary works were intended for the voice. The anonymous author of the Arthurian romance *Hunbaut* (1225–1250) boasts, in the prologue, of the quality of his lines, of their rhymes, and of their structure, adding: 'Listen how the diction [*dire fort*, 'say it aloud'] improves them!' (l. 37). A semantic analysis of this type of oral marker (which suggests presentation to an audience) has been carried out on the 310 French fictional works written between 1120 and 1260. The analysis reveals that no less than 225 of those works contain: *oïr* ('hear', 165 times), *escouter* ('listen', 65 times), or *entendre* ('to know by ear', 45 times). The huge number of such explicit appeals to an audience is significant. Apart from ten or so of these works, the rest were intended to be read out, or recited by heart, in a group setting.³ Sometimes their authors explicitly address an audience of knights, ladies, and clergy, whereas the villeins, who are compared to the harp-playing donkey of the fable, lack understanding. Such elitist declarations are not only rhetorical, they reveal the author's intention of reaching an aristocratic audience. Around the year 1200, the *raison d'être* of vernacular literature was merely courtly sociability. The nobleman's castle was, typically, the sort of place in which such works were performed, with a noble audience participating as 'co-creator' in the performance.⁴

² Gourevitch, 'Représentations et attitudes à l'égard de la propriété', 541–545.

³ Gallais, 'Recherches sur la mentalité des romanciers', 483–485.

⁴ Hanning, 'The Audience as Co-Creator of the First Chivalric Romances'.

Halls, rooms, and gardens

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the number of fortified manor houses increased considerably. Paradoxically, this may be explained by the strengthening of kingship, the pacification of the country, and the reduction of local conflicts between the nobility. With nobody left to fight, the lord no longer had such need of the younger members and cadets of his rocky castle garrison. Rather than have them taking up room in his fortress to no profit, he preferred to let them go by providing them with a fief out on the plains, outside the castle.⁵ When called upon by king, duke or earl, he would train his troops, forty days per year, in wars against neighbouring principalities. The knights who ventured outside the lords' castles built miniature imitations of the fortresses, but their houses were in fact devoid of the lordly castles' defensive potential. Indeed, the princely authorities saw to it that these retainers no longer flaunted the lord's power in a manner which might be overly ostentatious or threatening. Around the Mediterranean, many noblemen chose to live in cities or towns, where the appearance of their multi-storied palaces proclaimed a social rank far above that of the peasantry or of the artisans. From the end of the twelfth century, most princes chose one town as their capital, where they spent most of their time. Similarly, the great lords increasingly preferred to stay in only one of their castles (often in a town).

The architecture of the old fortified manor houses was transformed, not always to the detriment of their warlike status, while the princes' keeps became stronger and higher, thereby advertising their owners' increased power and influence. The castles of the highest ranking individuals acquired even greater influence.⁶ The general level of comfort also increased, becoming a more important factor than military effectiveness in the more modest fortified manor houses. The *State of Alsace*, a brief and rather negative Latin description of the moral conditions of the clergy and of the rest of Alsatian society at the beginning of the thirteenth century, includes a complaint against the obsolescence of some keeps: 'In the countryside, the noblemen have such small keeps that they can hardly defend themselves against their peers' (§11). The fortified manor houses of the lower nobility become palaces, to the detriment of their defensive capabilities. Decorative elements were added and the fortified houses

⁵ Richard, 'Châteaux, châtelains et vasseaux'; Barthélemy, *Les Deux âges de la seigneurie banale*, 142–197; Bur, ed., *La Maison forte au Moyen Âge*.

⁶ Mesqui, *Châteaux forts et fortifications*, 11–12, 103–104, 277–278, 339–340.

were increasingly divided by partition walls separating the different rooms.⁷

Literature—whether in the form of romances to be read out loud, or improvised songs to be sung during evening gatherings—was ever present in aristocratic homes, from the lowliest fortified manor house to the most spectacular royal palaces. This literary presence was to be found in different places which may be classified in accordance with the trilogy attested in medieval documentation: *aula* ('reception hall'), *camera* ('bedroom'), and *capella* ('chapel'). Vernacular literature thrived in the public *aula* and in the private *camera*, while the *capella* was usually reserved for liturgical Latin, biblical exegesis, and theological study.

The large reception hall was generally on the first, or 'noble', floor of the main tower or of an annexe, while the dimly-lit ground floor was used as a storeroom. The reception hall was sometimes of considerable dimensions: the *aula* built by king William Rufus in 1097 at Westminster had a surface area of around 1500 square metres (73m x 20m), and the one built in the palace of dukes d'Aquitaine at Poitiers around the year 1200, of around 800 square metres (47m x 17m). The windows also increased in size. They were covered with silk curtains or wax-covered parchment, because glass windows were still relatively rare. They were often paired and flanked by columns with sculpted capitals. If the walls were thick enough, alcoves or benches could be cut in. This allowed those who wished to sit and calmly observe activities in the 'inner courtyard' (the area between the keep and the castle walls), to contemplate the landscape, or to read privately during daylight. The walls of the reception hall were decorated with pillars, reliefs, tympana, and blind arcades, which were sometimes embellished with polychromic stone and marble, making the colours of the frescoes, mosaics, panels, caissons, and beams of painted wood stand out further still. Further color was provided by the carpets, and also by the tapestries which were sometimes hung up on rails to divide up the hall. Aromatic plants thrown on the floor also helped to retain the warmth. William Fitz Stephen describes how Thomas Becket (d. 1170), chancellor of the king of England, made sure that 'hay or fresh straw in winter, and rushes or green leaves in summer' were changed each day so that knights who were not able to find room on the benches would not dirty their clothes when sitting on the floor (§11). But the hall was of

⁷ Two recent collective publications provide more information on the exterior and interior layout of the castles: *Résidences aristocratiques, résidences du pouvoir et Viure a palau al'edat mitjana*. For an earlier period, see Bourgeois, 'Les résidences des élites'.

course heated by a fireplace with a chimney which was almost always decorated. Small ceramic braziers were sometimes also used for heating purposes and placed around the floor.

The furniture was similarly lavish. The table, often folding and painted, was only set up on trestles for meals. Wooden benches, adorned with feather cushions, silk and draperies, were placed near the walls and could be used as beds at night. Wooden chests contained part of the silverware and ceramics which might also be presented on dressers or shelves. The chests also contained bedding and clothes. Everywhere, wooden frames were used for hanging up clothes and as perches for the birds of prey. The only preserved manuscript of *The Poem of the Cid* (c. 1200) opens with a description of such wooden frames when the hero abandons the hall of his castle for exile: 'With tears in his eyes, crying bitterly, he turned his head. He saw the open doors, the broken locks, the wooden poles now bereft of pelisses, coats, falcons, or sparrow hawks with their moulted plumage' (l. 1–5). In his treatise on etiquette (written in Latin hexameters), the Englishman Daniel of Beccles implies that there were also greyhounds and watchdogs along with the birds of prey, and also, curiously, chargers and palfreys (l. 2206–10). Candelabras were hung from the walls, along with racks of spears and shields. This battle décor corresponded to the essentially masculine space of the *aula*, the place where the castle garrison was housed, where the lord carried out his legal duties and where the peasants brought the part of their harvest which was due to him. Women only passed through this space. Daniel of Beccles bans them from spinning wool or linen or from leaving carded yarns or distaffs in the *aula* (l. 2211–5). He considers it unsuitable for women to spend any length of time in the great hall in connection with their spinning work, or even for their weaving or sewing. They would only stay there during banquets or feasts.

While the noble floor and its *aula* were public, the higher floors often had private *cameræ*. The lord and his lady's bedroom was to be found here; but this area was mostly a gynaecium, since the lady of the castle usually resided there with her daughters and relations, ladies-in-waiting and servants, where they would look after young children and sew, spin, or weave. In the thirteenth-century verse *Le Roman de Silence* (1150–1200), by Heldris of Cornwall, the female protagonist, who is twelve years old and who spends her time hunting in the woods, is sharply reprimanded by Nature, who appears to her in person, saying: 'Return to your room and your sewing, in accordance with natural law!' (l. 2528). The bed was the central piece of furniture in the bedrooms. There was a canopy

over the bed and its width was greater than its length for it was often intended to sleep up to six people. During the day it was used as a divan. Its cushions, sheets, and covers were made from expensive multicoloured materials which hinted at the wealth of the castle. There would also have been a few chairs, stools, clothes chests, and sometimes even a dressing table with a mirror.

The bedroom could be divided up with the help of curtains. In *Lai de Guigemar*, a fairytale fantasy written by Marie de France at the end of the twelfth century, a curtain separates the bed of a young wife abandoned by her husband from that of her bridesmaid (I, l. 366–7). The cleanliness of these female rooms would seem to have been greater than that of the reception halls, where recent archaeological investigations have found the remains of considerable amounts of food which were simply thrown on the floor. Around 1270, in his continuation of the *Romance of the Rose*, Jean de Meung compares the trouble taken by young ladies artificially hiding their bodily defects to Venus' bedroom, where spiders' webs and mosses have to be removed (l. 13340–4). He thus provides an ironical allusion to the cleaning of those rooms in which there is a greater and more obvious female presence.

When the weather was warm enough, the men and women of the castle or of the urban palace would meet in the orchard, which was also kitchen, medicinal, and pleasure garden, all in one. The Franciscan friar Salimbene di Adam describes the courtyard of a house he entered in the town of Pisa in order to beg. The climbing vines provided shade and cool. 'Leopards and other foreign creatures' add an exotic flavour to the place. Several boys and girls wearing expensive clothes 'were producing a very pleasant sound from their vielles, citharas, and other musical instruments. Their bodies made elegant movements [...]. They started singing a beautiful and little known song, and the words, the different voices, and the melody filled the court with much joy' (p. 61). As he left the court, a stranger, also from Parma, came up to him and aggressively reprimanded him for the poverty of his chosen lifestyle, saying that Salimbene's father could easily provide for his son's needs. The scene which Salimbene had just witnessed also made him feel nostalgic for his former existence, but the Virgin Mary appeared to him in order to mitigate the temptation of going against his Franciscan vocation. Coming as he did from an aristocratic family, Salimbene was not unaffected by the beauty of the garden or the songs being sung there by beautiful and wealthy children. The anecdote clearly describes the orchard as a privileged site for social events of a literary and musical nature.

A literary setting

The iconography of most frescoes, tapestries, and panels was based on episodes from literary works which might have been performed in those places. Between 1220 and 1330, the hall of Rodenegg castle in Southern Tyrol (which measured 7 metres by 4) contained frescoes of the adventures of Ywain, including one of the Knights of the Round Table, based on *Iwein* (c. 1200), a romance written by Hartmann von Aue. Around 1250, a smaller room on the ground floor of the palace in Schmalkalden (Thuringia) presented twenty-six frescoes from the same cycle; here, unlike the former frescoes based on the romance, Yvain and Laudine's wedding and its festivities take up a considerable amount of room.⁸ Apart from Arthurian fiction, the nobility also had paintings executed in their homes which represented the military victories they had participated in. At the end of the thirteenth century, Bernat de Caldes, enriched by trade, built a palace in a new district of Barcelona, whose lords were the Montcadas. He commissioned a painting in the hall on its first floor representing the conquest of Majorca (1229), during which two members of his lords family, Guillem and Ramon de Montcada, were killed.⁹

The first two frescoes are a reflection of the widespread popularity among the German aristocracy of the Arthurian legend of Yvain. They thus provide a fixed visual representation on walls which would certainly have resonated with vocal expressions of the same stories on appropriate occasions. The visual representations would, however, have modified or adapted the oral versions. On another level, the story of the heroes of Montcada who died during the re-conquest of Majorca was part of a family history which was transmitted orally from one generation to the next into the lineage and to its vassals and others subjects. As such, it could have been put down in writing, as was the case with several other episodes of the struggle against Islam, of which the result might have been several autobiographic books. The Montcada fresco is therefore an early example of the portrait gallery, a genre which was later to become increasingly popular among the nobility. Portraits of popes and emperors are the only examples cited by sources from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.¹⁰ Genealogical memory was thus translated into painting, in the same way as it was often translated into writing.

⁸ Rushing, 'The Medieval German Pictorial Evidence', 257–260.

⁹ Lasarte, *Pintures del segle XIII al carrer Montcada*.

¹⁰ Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 118; John of Salisbury, *The Letters*, ep. 124, t. 1, 208.

The majority of the visual representations in the halls and rooms of the castle were, however, connected with aristocratic life. They depict carol dancing to the accompaniment of harp, tambourine, or bagpipes; acrobats and animal trainers; parlour games; and hunting and tournaments. They provide a more or less idealized image of the type of entertainment which the aristocracy participated in within the very walls where the paintings were executed and displayed. Courtly love was depicted above all on cabinets and jewellery caskets which were made of sculpted or painted wood or ivory. Other, larger cabinets, also embellished with romantic themes, were used to transport the dowry or the bride's trousseau during the procession to her new home.¹¹ Episodes from the romance of Tristan and Iseult were sometimes depicted on such larger cabinets.¹² Courtly scenes, represented in accordance with the conventions of romantic poetry and without reference to any specific literary cycle, were also drawn from fiction, but from less obvious sources.

The Arthurian romances also describe these frescoes, but their narratives actually tell us more about their authors than about the pictorial practices of that period. Captured by Morgan le Fay, the eponymous protagonist of *Lancelot* (1215–1225) kills time by painting annotated episodes of his romance with Guinevere on the walls of his prison, thereby exorcising the anguish of imprisonment and incidentally also sublimating his romantic passion: 'Being able to see his lady brought him much pleasure and considerably alleviated his suffering' (vol. 5, p. 52). Artistic activity awakened memories of his sweetheart, who was presented, or 'represented', in the form of her image, thus also protecting him from the advances of his female jailor. In the *Death of King Arthur* (1230), which continues the aforementioned romance, Morgan le Fay takes revenge by going to Arthur to accuse Lancelot, his best friend, of having committed adultery with Guinevere. To back up her claims, she shows the frescoes to the cheated Arthur as irrefutable proof of the deceit of his vassal and of his wife (§50–52). The anecdote fits in perfectly with the narrative pattern of the Lancelot-Holy Grail cycle, thereby setting the scene for the inevitable final tragedy in which the king and the Knights of the Round Table perish.¹³ In the *Perlesvaus* (1200–1210), on the other hand, the description of a fresco does not serve to further the action but rather to recall other episodes. The reader learns about Gawain's childhood through the mural

¹¹ This is according to later examples: Baskins, *Cassone Painting: Humanism and Gender*, 4–5.

¹² Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur* (550–1250), 221.

¹³ Girbea, *La Couronne et l'aureole*, 483–485.

paintings of the chapel in which he was christened: his illegitimate birth, his training under a vavasour and a forester, his being taken in by the pope, and his being refused imperial election (X, l. 7296–7328). Lastly, the unfortunate wife in Marie de France's Breton narrative poem *Guigemar* is locked up in a room in which her husband has had pictures painted of Venus going about her work, who threw into the fire Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* ('The Cure for Love'), in which the latter recommends marital infidelity (I, l. 234–235). The above examples, taken exclusively from the Matter of Britain, may illustrate the use of frescoes in literary plots, but they certainly do not provide a faithful description of any actual work of art. They do nevertheless corroborate the spread of frescoes on literary themes in twelfth- and thirteenth-century palaces, a fact confirmed by archaeology and other sources as well.

In classical style romances, the description of decorative images sometimes becomes purple prose, in which the author, always a cleric, demonstrates his rhetorical skills and knowledge of the classics in a long digression. Around 1150, the *Romance of Thebes* describes the stone walls and tapestries of King Adrastus's bedroom (l. 980–995). It also describes, in even greater detail, the king's bed canopy (l. 3235–3276, 4300–4397) which is crowned with a carbuncle, an eagle, and an ivory dove. The sides of the canopy depict a map of the world divided into five zones, the cycle of the four seasons, and the history of the kings of Greece and their legislature, inspired by Ovid's *Metamorphosis* and by the Neo-Platonist philosopher Macrobius's *Dream of Scipio* (c. 400), the latter being very popular among the masters of the school of Chartres, including William of Conches (d. 1154). This iconography should be understood as having a literary construction. It is as coherent as it is scholarly, exalting the absolute power of the king, represented by the symbol of the sun radiating outwards like the carbuncle. Its imagery suggests that Adrastus is powerful in war (the eagle symbol) and equitable in peace (the dove). He knows, and masters, the map of the world, the cycle of the seasons, and the history of Greece which is dominated by laws passed by his forebears.¹⁴ Another French twelfth-century writer, Alexander of Paris, tells a similar story about Alexander the Great, who contemplates from his bed a map of Asia, Europe, and Africa (all of which he wishes to conquer one day) (I, l. 2020–35). The literary descriptions of artistic images are of considerable symbolic wealth. While they may delight cultural historians due to their numerous references and connotations, archaeologists and art historians

¹⁴ Mora, 'Des Romans d'Antiquité'; Petit, 'Les premières descriptions de tentes'.

are often disappointed with such literary descriptions since they reveal precious little regarding the actual nature of the pictorial works of art.

Adela of Normandy (d. 1137), the wife of Stephen II (d. 1102), count of Blois and Chartres, and the sister of Henry I of England, was undeniably erudite. She corresponded with Anselm of Canterbury, Hildebert of Lavardin, Saint Ivo of Chartres, Geoffrey of Reims, and Hugh of Fleury, in other words, with the most prominent scholars of the prestigious schools of Normandy, Anjou, Chartrain, and Champagne.¹⁵ Their colleague, the monk Baudri (1046–1130), abbot of Saint Pierre de Bourgeuil and later bishop of Dol-de-Bretagne (before being deposed by a Papal legate), was an exceptionally gifted Latin scholar. Baudri, an admirer and imitator of Ovid, states that he would blush, like a peasant, with embarrassment when faced with Adela, who was more beautiful than Diana the Huntress, and whose gaze was as petrifying as that of the Gorgon or of Circe (134, l. 75–87). He also devoted two laudatory poems to Adela. In one of the poems, which was a mere thirty-two lines in length, he asks her to make him a cape. In order to persuade her, he flatters her for her generous patronage and also her moral support for poets lacking inspiration whom she is able to ‘transform from taciturn to eloquent’ (135, l. 14). He even goes as far as to write that she ‘guides their pens, breathes into their lines, and fills their mouths with words’ (l. 11–12). At Adela’s court, such hyperbole would have smacked of the ridiculous if there had been no foundation to it in reality.

In contrast to his first poem, Baudri’s second poem devoted to Adela of Normandy would seem to be the longest he ever wrote, running to 1368 lines. It is entirely given over to the glorification of Adela. He begins by remarking on her sound judgement on literary matters and on the welcome she extends to writers whom she puts up in her palace, helping them in person and showering them with gifts (134, l. 42–45). After this, for over a thousand lines, Baudri embarks upon a dithyrambic description of her bedroom in her palace in Blois (l. 90–1342). He describes the walls of the room as being entirely covered with tapestries of silk, gold, and silver thread, and says that Adela supervised their elaboration personally with pencil in hand. The tapestries depict the Creation and the Flood according to the *Book of Genesis*, along with other episodes in Holy Scripture taken from *Exodus* and the *Book of Kings*. Greek mythology, the Trojan War, and the wars of the Romans also appear in the tapestries. The canopy of

¹⁵ Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity*, 168; Bezzola, *La Société féodale*, 374–381, Johns, *Noblewomen, Aristocracy*, 32–33.

Adela's bed reflects the recent history of Normandy, with depictions of the conquest of England by her father, William the Conqueror. Baudri had also seen, elsewhere, the famous Bayeux Tapestry, which may have inspired this part of his description. The canopy of heaven and the starry dome are painted on the ceiling of her room, featuring the zodiac, the stellar constellations, and the revolutions of the spheres. The marble flooring, covered by protective glass, shows a map of the world with its rivers and seas, hills and volcanoes, its animals and monsters, and also with its towns. The sculpted ivory feet of the bed would appear to have been more original, with inscriptions which claimed to have been personally dictated by Adela. They symbolise philosophy and its seven divisions (i.e. the sciences of the *quadrivium* and of the *trivium*, and also medicine). Each of these is represented by a female figure, in accordance with the allegory in the *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* ('On the Marriage of Philology and Mercury') by Martianus Capella, a satirist of the fifth century. While far from realistic, widely inspired by the classics and generally given over to rhetorical effect, the description of Adela's room succeeds in exalting her queen-like domination over time and space. The description emphasises her knowledge, while the suitably feminised arts converge on the bed, the axial centre of a lady's bedroom.

Poems were sung and romances read out mainly in the reception hall, in the lady's bedroom, or in the garden of the castle's inner courtyard. Sometimes this area was even specifically designed and decorated to facilitate literary performances, if only through murals. The interaction between the text, the performer, and the murals reflects the deep-rooted base of literature within courtly culture. Even if fictional, the poets' detailed description of an imaginary iconography reflects their awareness of the artistic and poetic images of the palace. The castle was not only a seat of power from which force was imposed (in the more or less legitimate form of coercion), nor was it merely an administrative centre for a burgeoning bureaucracy, or merely a defensive structure, exclusively intended for war. The castle was indeed also a place of refined culture and literary creation.

Literature intended for performance

The most suitable moment for the performance of literary works would seem to have been the end of the banquet, when all the men and women of the castle were together. The poetry and music which accompanied such

works were indeed too essential in noble society to be reduced to mere background noise for the meal¹⁶ (the latter being the other specific form of aristocratic social interaction). Joinville describes how the minstrels would arrive with their *vielles* in the room in which Saint Louis and his friends were eating. They would play their piece at the end of the meal but before the priests gave thanks to God. The king would then retire to his room and sit down at the end of his bed. Clerics would then provide him with a reading, although he in fact preferred more spontaneous conversation with close friends or relatives (§668). Larger and more open than the bedroom, the room on the noble floor presented the advantage of being able to host a large number of minstrels, musicians, storytellers, and readers as well as listeners, especially after the banquet tables had been removed. *Hunbaut* describes, for example, 'the paved room', where the young lady of the castle 'is listening to the fine words of a romance which is being read to her on her instructions' (l. 3052–3).

Ladies holding salon

The *aula* of the banquets was not the only room in which literary works were read or recited. The romances also describe literary gatherings in the ladies' room or in adjoining rooms. Chrétien de Troye's *Knight of the Lion* begins with a Pentecost celebration in King Arthur's palace in Carduel. 'After having eaten, the knights gathered in the rooms to which the ladies, damsels, or maids had called them, where some people told stories, and others spoke of romance' (l. 8–13). Among them stood Sir Calogrenant, along with other courtiers, by the door of the bedroom to which Arthur had retired to rest with Guinevere. 'He began to tell them a story, which brought not honour, but shame, upon himself' (l. 5960), in a manner which was so spellbinding that the queen got up to go and listen to him. Indeed, Calogrenant told the story of his own misadventure, seven years earlier, at the magic spring in Brocéliande forest, where he was thoroughly beaten by a mysterious knight. In order to avenge the affront, his cousin Sir Ywain, who was also present, decided, in turn, to take on the knight, thereby beginning the story of the novel. Thus, by a complex interplay of mirrors, he became his own double, following exactly the same adventure, except that it had a different ending, while those who listened to the romance also found themselves in the same situation as Ywain and his companions, listening to the same story they had already

¹⁶ Clouzot, '*Homo ludens, homo viator*', 297.

heard from Calogrenant. In the end, the sincerity with which the knight described his failure gained him even greater esteem from his peers, because of the unequal nature of his improvised combat with the mysterious knight. Only the vulgar seneschal Keu, a rather dark character who is constantly sarcastic and negative, made fun of Calogrenant and his cousin. The character of Keu represents the growing court bureaucracy (l. 588–645). Like Calogrenant, many Knights of the Round Table enhanced their reputation by taking the floor at court to describe their adventures, thereby undeniably acquiring increased prestige for themselves. In the miniatures of some Arthurian manuscripts, they are as often represented standing in court, gesticulating as they narrate their knightly exploits, just as they are represented accomplishing those same exploits on the battlefield; a cleric is sometimes depicted in the process of writing down their exploits. Such iconographic examples reveal the extent to which stories of battle fascinated aristocratic audiences.¹⁷

That ladies should be among the audience listening to such manly tales of war is not merely literary fiction. Joinville describes the words spoken to him by the count of Soissons during the battle of al-Mansura (1250) in Egypt: ‘Senechal, let the scoundrels shout [...]; we will still be talking about this day, you and I, in the ladies’ room’ (§242). Similarly, knights, clerics, and storytellers could read, recite, or sing romances, short stories, or poems to women. Around 1250, the German Wartburgkrieg provides a parody setting for the well-known romance writer, Wolfram von Eschenbach, who had died thirty or so years earlier. As he was preparing to begin his story at the court of Thuringia, the count stopped him abruptly: ‘If you wish to continue your story, we must first fetch the ladies!’ (§33, l. 2–3), whereupon the countess immediately hurried into the room accompanied by forty or so of her attendants.

The composition of the frontispiece miniature of a manuscript prepared around 1300 for Marie of Brabant (1254–1321), the second wife of Philip III of France (1270–1285), is more intimate, involving merely four characters. This illumination is to be found above the acrostic poem *Cléomadès* (1283–1285) that Adenet le Roi wrote and dedicated to the queen and to the king’s sister, Blanche of France. The minstrel is depicted with a crown on his head, in accordance with his nickname, holding a vielle. He has one knee on the ground in front of Marie (who is lying on her bed with her head propped up on one elbow), Marie’s sister-in-law Blanche, and Marie’s brother, Jean of Brabant, dressed in cloaks with

¹⁷ Girbea, *La Couronne et l’auréole*, 496–497.

their respective coat of arms. The scene represents the performance of *Cléomadès* in the bedroom, a section of the narrative which follows afterwards in the manuscript.

This miniature of Marie of Brabant as a literary patron is by no means exceptional and corresponds to the well-attested phenomenon of female patronage, as demonstrated by Geoffrey Gaymar's expression of gratitude towards Constance, Raoul Fitz Gilbert's wife, or, to take another example, Baudri of Bourgueil's gratitude towards Adela of Normandy. This is the case for a considerable number of works: altogether, thirty or so French romances from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are dedicated to female patrons.¹⁸ The prologues or epilogues of such works sometimes associate these female patrons with their husbands, or else present them alone, in the process of encouraging the author to write, occasionally going as far as to employ a 'touch of emotional blackmail'.¹⁹ In the first lines of *Floriant et Florete* (c. 1280), for example, the anonymous author clamours for the help of Love personified and of the lady who holds his heart under her guardianship, that both might provide the support without which he will not be able to finish his work. In the epilogue to his *Bel inconnu*, Renaud de Bâgé (c. 1165–1230) implores his true love to tell him whether he should continue his story or not, whether he should hasten the meeting, or if she prefers, the separation, of the hero and the heroine. It is thus supposedly up to the dedicatee in this case to decide on the ending of the story, in the same way as she is supposed to decide on the fate of her romantic adventure with the author. In fact, the ladies mentioned in these two books were anonymous and the romantic trick may not refer to a specific person. But even when such flattering address did mention the name of the muse, rhetoric was always considered appropriate. We might take the example of Chrétien de Troyes attributing the subject matter of his *Knight of the Cart* to Marie of France (d. 1198), countess of Champagne, a story which he claims, with false modesty, to have simply structured in writing.

The dedications were sometimes unique to each and every manuscript, with the author of the work changed or the names of future patrons added, depending on circumstances. Geoffrey of Monmouth, for example, provides three different prologues for his *History of the Kings of Britanny*: the first for Robert of Gloucester, the second for Robert of Gloucester and Waleran of Meulan, the third for Robert of Gloucester and Stephen of

¹⁸ Krueger, *Women Readers and the Ideology of Gender*, 253–258.

¹⁹ Green, *Women Readers*, 206.

Blois, King of England.²⁰ Similarly, one of the four manuscripts of monk Benedeit's *Saint Brendan's Voyage* (a 2,000-line translation in Anglo-Norman octosyllabics of the Latin text describing the voyage of an Irish abbot to hell and paradise) is dedicated to Queen Matilda of Scotland (d. 1118), the first wife of Henry I, whose name is replaced in three subsequent manuscripts by that of Adela of Louvain (d. 1151), the King's second wife (l. 1). The reason for these changes was simply that such dedications were often merely prospective in nature, rather than being signs of gratitude. In other words, these dedications did not express gratitude for any help received, but rather requested support for future books which the author intended to write. The lady in question was thus solicited for another work to be done, or at least to intercede and encourage her husband to display generosity towards the writer.

Writers expected their patrons to provide them with board and lodging at court, and sometimes even an income, which, in the case of clerics, often consisted of a canonic prebend. They were thus able to devote themselves to their writing freed from any material worries. The German translator of the *Life of Saint Marguerite of Antioch*, who was based in Wallerstein (Swabia), made the following remark regarding Clémence d'Auxonne (d. 1235), duchess of Zähringen: 'I have so often bowed down in gratefulness for the generosity of the lady for whom I am endeavouring to write this small book. I thereby seek to ensure that she will not allow me to end up in the street' (l. 62–68). The uncertainties of such situations of dependence would clearly not have facilitated literary creation. In the epilogue to his German adaptation of the *Aeneid* (c. 1160), Hendrik van Veldeke (c. 1140–c.1190) explains why he was forced to abandon his writing for a decade or so. In 1175, he lent the only existing copy of his manuscript, four fifths of which was complete, to Countess Marguerite de Cleves, who then married his patron, Ludwig III, count of Thuringia (d. 1190). She subsequently entrusted it to one of her maids of honour. Unfortunately, the unfinished book was then stolen by a certain Count Heinrich, who may have been Heinrich Raspe (d. 1180), Ludwig III's youngest brother, or Heinrich of Schwarzburg (d. 1184), Ludwig's archenemy. It was only in 1184, at the festivities organised in Mainz by Frederick Barberossa, that Ludwig's brothers Hermann (d. 1217) and Frederick (d. 1213) retrieved the book and returned it to Hendrik, entreating him to finish it (§352–353). This anecdote illustrates not only the vicissitudes of a writer's work, which depended only too often on the generosity and

²⁰ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur* (550–1250), 105–107, 282–284.

benevolence of patrons, but also provides an indication of the circulation of books among the aristocracy, through channels which were not always perfectly above board.²¹

Ladies, such as the countess of Cleves or her lady-in-waiting, did not limit themselves to merely listening to readings of the manuscripts that they sponsored. The beginning of the *Tale of Floire and Blancheflor* suggests that they also interpreted such works. The narrative is in the first person: 'One Friday, after the meal, I entered a room to enjoy the company of some young ladies [...]. I sat down on the bed to listen to them. Two sisters of high birth, both beautiful and well-mannered, were speaking together of love. The elder of the two was telling her younger sister that she very much liked a two-hundred-year-old idyll of the romance between two young people. A good cleric, who had first read the idyll in a book, had repeated it to her' (l. 33–54). This story in fact provides the central thread of the *Tale of Floire and Blancheflor*. The elder sister, who told the story to the anonymous narrator, had heard it from a scholarly cleric, who in turn had learnt it from his readings. For a medieval audience, the fact that the tale is written in a book is a proof of truthfulness, coherence, and knowledge. The young lady thus tells her story from memory, with no written aid. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Lion*, however, the charming daughter of the owner of the castle of 'Pesme Avanture' reads a romance to her parents who are reclining on silk sheets spread out on the ground in an orchard, with their heads propped up on their elbows (l. 5364–72). In Wirnt von Grafenberg's *Wigalois* (1204–1215), the daughter of the King of Persia listens, in his tent, to a young lady reading about the sacking of Troy and of the escape of Aeneas and his meeting with Dido (l. 2710–22). The list could be continued of heroines who are described in various romances as reading aloud. This indicates that such reading was a prestigious activity, and not merely of an imaginary nature, but also corresponding to a certain social reality.

L'Escloufe (1200–1202), written by Jean Renart, who was a minstrel in the courts of the counts and bishops of Flanders and Champagne, describes the character of Aélis, the daughter of the emperor, as being 'much gifted in singing and telling of adventures' (l. 2058–9). The juxtaposition of the two talents is revealing, since learning to sing (and also sometimes to play an instrument) was often part of a young lady's education. More conventionally, Aélis moreover knows how to sew, as does Frêne, one of the characters in *Galeran de Bretagne*, a romance which is sometimes also

²¹ Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 471–472, 481.

attributed to Jean Renart. Of noble birth, Frêne is abandoned as a child, but while in the convent, she learns ‘the harp, lays, notes, keeping time, Saracen melodies, Gascon, French and Lorraine songs, and Breton lays’ (l. 1166–71). The description is surely idealistic, and also dictated by the plot, since her musical talents later allow Frêne to disguise herself as a minstrel and thereby approach her loved one. Her character nevertheless provides an accurate reflection of the musical education of young girls of noble extraction, which is also well documented elsewhere.

Such praise for high-ranking ladies sometimes associates them, more or less conventionally, to the music they practise or sponsor. In 1173, Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204) was brought captive to England to punish her for revolting against her husband Henry II of England. The anonymous successor of the chronicle of Richard of Poitiers, a monk at Cluny Abbey, describes her misfortune with musical metaphors, recalling her entourage of musicians: ‘Now your cithara produces only gloomy chords, and your flute mournful sounds (Job 30, 31). Previously so delicate and voluptuous (Is 47, 1), you enjoyed royal freedoms and overflowing riches, you were surrounded by virgins who played tambourines and citharas while singing for you in dulcet tones. And the sounds of the instruments were pleasant to your ears. You took great delight in the virtuosity of your musicians.’²² At that time, literary works were usually performed to the accompaniment of musical instruments. Consequently, the quality of a court and of its cultural life was largely measured by the number of its musicians.

Dancing, jeux partis, and dialogues

One exceptional account affords us a much more realistic description than the romances about musical practices in which women played a prominent role. On 8 September 1285, Henry, count of Salm-en-Vosges, asked a minstrel named Jacques Bretel to write a versified account of the six-day tournament which had just been held in Chavency, in Lorraine. His 4,563 octosyllabic lines relate not only the jousting contests but also the entertainment which was laid on for the participants. The author devotes particular attention to the songs he heard, going as far as writing down the lyrics of thirty-five songs. The knights and ladies would begin singing together whilst the adversaries set off for the starting line or returned to the castle, but also, and above all, during the evening gathering when all

²² Edited and translated into French by Labande, *Pour une image véridique*, 90–91.

the tables had been removed. The women sometimes danced without the men. Thus, on Tuesday evening, during the *Robardel*, literally a ‘robber’s’ singing dance, two young girls mimed a shepherdess and the shepherd who stole a kiss from her, to the accompaniment of a *vielle*. On Thursday morning, there was carol dancing by the women only. The same evening, after the great final melee of the tournament, Beatrice of Luxembourg, the highest ranking lady in the audience, undertook to perform the *Chapelet* (‘Crown of Flowers’): she sang and danced in order to simulate romantic passion and suffering, at the same time responding to a *vielle* player who asked her to designate a husband among those present; it was the winner of the tournament who was chosen for her.²³ Dancing and singing thus became theatrical, based on themes which were chosen in advance or improvised on the spot. A certain amount of singing ability and musical and choreographic technique was thus essential for those ladies and maids who hankered after social success.

Female participation was prominent in *jeux partis*, literally ‘party games’ (in the sense of ‘shared out’ or ‘divided up’) or in exchanges of improvised verse between one or several poets who would choose the same metre, rhyme, and melody. Half of the Occitan songs composed by female troubadours belong to this literary genre. At the end of the thirteenth century, the rules of etiquette that Amanieu de Sescas sent to a young bridesmaid advise her to participate in *jeux partis* in pleasant and courteous manner, avoiding any coarse behaviour (l. 230–3). It was certainly the case that versified exchanges were almost always based on romantic casuistry which could easily tend towards erotic or bawdy genres. Further north, the *Life* of Jón Ögmundsson (d. 1121), the first bishop of Iceland, who was canonized in 1200, describes his opposition to this custom: ‘One of the favourite pastimes of the people, although quite inappropriate, was that of exchanging verses: a man would address mocking and unsuitable verses to a woman, and vice versa in reply. By banning this practice, bishop Jón fortunately put an end to this custom’ (§13). This description illustrates the widespread popularity of such entertainment, which is not surprising given the ease with which some practitioners were able to improvise poems and songs, regardless of their ability to read and write, in a largely oral culture. However, this saga also describes Saint Jón’s similar eagerness to ban clerics in his entourage from reading Ovid’s collection of letters, thereby demonstrating that the *jeu parti* was also widespread among men of letters, even in

²³ Delbouille, ‘Introduction’ to Jacques Bretel, LVII–LXXII.

such northern parts. The versified letters between Paris and Helen, or between the mythical lovers in Ovid's *Heroides*, provide further proof, if any were necessary.²⁴

The twenty-one judgements about love behaviour in the *De Amore* (1184–1186), a work in Latin written by Andreas Capellanus, a cleric from northern France, may perhaps represent a parody of the very same form of courtly entertainment described above. The judgements are ironically attributed to Marie of France (d. 1198), countess of Champagne; to her mother Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204); to Adela of Champagne (d. 1206), queen of France; and to Ermengarde of Narbonne (d. 1197), in addition to a host of Gascon ladies. All these women sit along with other women in a law court of love which, unlike the ladies themselves, is most certainly imaginary or, if they ever did meet in such circumstances, then it was merely for entertainment purposes. They convict several lovers and mistresses for the crime of lacking consideration towards their partner (II, 7). However, in order to ridicule these ladies, Capellanus did not need to seek inspiration from *jeux partis* in verse. In court, debates on romantic casuistry could be exchanged in prose of the most banal form. This entertainment contained thus a dialogue imposed about a specified theme. In his *Tournoi de Chauvency*, Jacques Bretel refers to the game of king and queen; and to the game of the king who doesn't lie (l. 2958–2960). The rule of these games was probably that the leader would put questions to each of the participants in turn who had to reply honestly in order to avoid a forfeit. Most of the questions were of course about love, either generally or more personally.

The most widespread form of literary social exchange was collective participation in the performance of a song or a romance. Even if the storyteller was reading out from a manuscript, he could still improvise, and he also often accepted suggestions from his audience. Since any particular text changed from one oral presentation to the next, audience participation led to constant modification of the texts. In his romance *Erec* (c. 1180), Hartmann von Aue humorously inserts a long interjection by one of his listeners who claims to be able to better describe the saddle of Enid's (the wife of the main character) palfrey. Hartmann declares that he will stick close to the author's version of the story, which was probably written by Chrétien de Troyes. But a listener asks him to stop, since he claims he can deduce the type of saddle for himself. A rapid discussion ensues:

²⁴ Dronke, *Women Writers of the Middle Ages*, 105–106.

- ‘It was made of good quality wood and iron’, claims the improvising listener.
- ‘Well, what else would it be made of?’
- ‘And covered with shining gold.’
- ‘Who could have told you that kind of detail?’
- ‘With solid straps.’
- ‘You’re quite right.’
- ‘And beautiful red woollen material...’
- ‘You’re very amusing.’ (l. 7501–7515)

Hartmann maintained his rhyme scheme of course, writing the dialogue in verse, although the same versifying rules could also easily have been applied, to the greater satisfaction of those present, during the improvised exchange between storyteller and audience.

The discussions which took place after the public reading of romances were less strictly bound. The listeners would comment on the events described and the characters involved. The books were too long to be read in one sitting and were covered one chapter at a time: the ensuing suspense led to debates on the possible outcome of the plot. The more subtle authors of the period, such as Chrétien de Troyes, founder of the knightly romance,²⁵ knew how to play on the ambiguous interaction between two registers, both parodying and moralising at one and the same time. In the ensuing discussions, the listeners would attempt to solve the equivocal nature of the situations invented by the author, or suggest possible solutions for the dilemma expressed by the interior monologue of the characters. More prosaically, the listener might criticise descriptions or accounts which did not correspond to his or her experience of real life. Such stories were therefore always of an open nature, calling for interpretation and analysis that the courtiers would typically engage in together.

While they might be of a fictional nature, literary accounts were never disconnected from their social and historical background. Their creation admittedly involved the author’s imagination, interior life, and individual experience, but the text was always created within a specific context. It is therefore impossible to detach the creative literary process of such authors from the courts within which they were based. In such courts, poor knights, clerics, or minstrels who wrote in the vernacular found patrons and defenders who would generously provide them with manuscripts to read from and who would look after their daily needs. But the inhabitants and visitors to

²⁵ Nykrog, *Chrétien de Troyes: romancier discutable*.

the castle were also a testing ground providing authors with immediate feedback on their work. The courtly audience was made up of men and women from different cultural backgrounds who were often prepared to enter into discussion with authors, to comment upon their work, and even in some instances to participate in the creative process. Fiction helped the audience to escape from ordinary life, while sometimes also providing a reflection of their daily existence. They were often very enthusiastic about fiction, participating personally in the creative process. Literary escapism was perhaps even essential to the equilibrium of courtly life, which was so often suffocating and claustrophobic. By sublimating the expectations and frustrations of the courtiers, literature might dissipate various social tensions, if only for the short duration of a song or an episode from a romance.

Minstrels and professional performers

The minstrels were frequent visitors to the noble courts where they performed a vast literary repertoire to musical accompaniment. Their voices thus revived countless poetic works that the knights composed or, more simply, listened to and learnt. ‘Jongleur’, the French word for minstrel, originates from the Latin *joculator* (‘he who plays’), a word derived from the root *jocus* (‘game’). The same is true of the German equivalent *Spielman*, from *Spiel* (‘game’). In mediaeval sources, *joculator* is synonymous with *ministerialis*, ‘minstrel’, which in turn is derived from *ministerium*, or ‘service’, implying a certain submissiveness. It also corresponds to the more classical *histrio*, which had carried negative connotations since ancient times (still to be found in the modern French ‘histrion’) or, in similar vein, *scurra* (‘buffoon’). *Actor*, *mimus*, and *saltator* all implied more specialised activities in the fields of dramatic representation, pantomime, or dance. The same was true for *musicus* (‘musician’), *cantator* (‘singer’), and all the other derivations from musical instruments. Specific lexical terms were sometimes used to refer to acrobats, funambulists, conjurors, magicians, or animal trainers. Medieval scholars formerly thought, wrongly, that the term ‘minstrel’ was used to designate an entertainer who was employed on a long term basis within the same court, as opposed to the more romantic figure of the itinerant *jongleur*, who travelled the world with only a small beggar’s bag, a songbook, and a vielle on his back.²⁶

²⁶ Menegaldo, *Le Jongleur dans la littérature narrative*, 219–228. Published in 2005, this book provides a recent, well-researched update and overview. The documentary sources

The meaning of the French *jongleur* was in fact very general, implying a whole range of occupations within the field of entertainment.

Jocus, the root of the word 'jongleur', corresponds to the entertainment which is vital for all human societies. Festivities are a time for play and enjoyment which provide momentary respite from the monotony of daily activities. They alleviate strained relationships between individuals, at least provisionally, thereby helping restore social equilibrium and a new enthusiasm for work. Such festivities were an intrinsic part of courtly life: the elite displayed their social dominance through the amount of time they could devote to sophisticated leisure activities, and through the material goods which they could casually consume during such activities without counting the cost. However, the success of such festivities depended on specialist entertainers. According to the *Reynard cycle* (1180–1190), Hermeline the fox would long since have married her sweetheart, Poincet the badger, if only she had found a minstrel to liven up their wedding (l. 2821–2822). Hermeline is Renart's wife, and she believes he has been hanged. The comedy succeeds even better because the husband himself, *incognito* behind his disguise as an English minstrel with a terrible accent in French, has to offer his services for the festivities which will follow the church wedding, despite being ferociously jealous (l. 2851–2946). Despite its satirical nature, this example reveals certain truths regarding the indispensable role of minstrels during such festivities.

Apart from weddings, fairs, and other such gatherings where much of the purpose was having fun, the minstrels also attended the castles and palaces of kings and the high-ranking aristocracy. From the second half of the twelfth century onwards, the considerable corpus of financial records and letters relating to Henry II of England and his wife Eleanor of Aquitaine provides detailed information regarding the minstrels, musicians, storytellers, dancers, entertainers, and jesters who received wages, board, and lodging in return for enlivening court life.²⁷ But even the less opulent dwellings of rural lords and indigent squirrelling were occasionally able to hire minstrels who would then appear in the lists of witnesses in their charters.²⁸ They were in fact frequent visitors to noble homes both rich and poor.

themselves were published a considerable time ago, in 1909, in the appendices to Faral, *Les Jongleurs en France au Moyen Âge*.

²⁷ Vincent, 'The Court of Henry II', 320–321.

²⁸ Cf. for example a document from 1123, preserved in the *Livre noir* of Béziers cathedral chapter, which describes the lord of a small village in the town hinterland surrounded by

Wide-ranging skills

The performance of literary works involved above all singing and storytelling. The lettered knights were sometimes the authors of such works, although their role was more often merely as spectators. The more gifted minstrels constantly trained their memories to store a veritable library of works. They were also masters of versifying techniques. They were thus able to sing long songs and tell stories which they knew by heart, providing a host of details and holding their audience in suspense for days on end with the complexity of the plot. If their memories failed, they were able to improvise verses in accordance with given rhymes and meter. In a book of morals, the Parisian master Peter the Chanter (d. 1197) describes the skills of these performers: 'If he sees that the *Chanson de Landri* doesn't amuse his audience, he will begin the *Song of Antioch*. If they are still not content, he may try Alexander [the Great], or move on disdainfully to Apollonius [of Tyre], Charlemagne, or yet another song'.²⁹ The theologian Peter the Chanter considered this a good example for priests to follow since they should always be able to adapt themselves to their public.

Composed around 1275–1300, the Occitan romance *Flamenca* lists a much wider repertoire of works mastered by the *jongleurs*. At the end of the post-wedding banquet, held in his own home by lord Archambaud de Bourbon, the *jongleurs* arrive to sing some *lais* (relatively short poetic tales) to instrumental accompaniment: 'One of them sang the *Lai of Honneysuckle* with a viole, the other sang the *Lai of Tintagel*; one of them sang the lai of the faithful lovers, another the lai of Sir Ywain' (l. 599–602). The list of stories which were sung without instrumental accompaniment is endless. The characters in the stories are mostly of classical origin: Priam, Paris and Helen, Hector and Achilles, Ulysses, Aeneas and Lavinia, Eteocles and Polynices, Apollonius of Tyre, Alexander the Great, Jason, Narcissus, Orpheus, Daedalus and Icarus, or Julius Caesar. The history of the Hebrews is also represented by David and Goliath, Sampson and Delilah, and Judas Maccabeus. Also included are the Breton heroes Gawain, Lancelot, Perceval, Lunette, Erec and Enide, Tristan, Fenic, Calogrenant and Merlin. The French cycle is well represented with Charlemagne, Clovis, Pépin, and Oliver of Verdun. The story of Chayr al-Jabal

his wife, daughters, servants, chaplain, and a minstrel: quoted by Amado, 'Clercs et moines', 136, n. 26.

²⁹ Long version of the *Verbum Abbreviatum*, fol. 35 of Latin register 106 of the Vatican Library, quoted by Baldwin, 'The Image of the Jongleur', 643, n. 30.

(‘The Old Man of the Mountain’) and his assassins provides an exotic oriental touch to a list of literary figures which goes on and on (l. 617–707). The list appears as rich as it is diverse and indicates a profound knowledge of the Greek and Roman history and myths which clerical Latin scholars had versified in Romance languages at least a century earlier. The list also illustrates the widespread distribution of French *chansons de geste* and Arthurian legends in the Occitan region.

The jongleurs accompanied their songs with musical instruments. The description of the festivities in *Flamenca* lists as many as twelve different instruments. Two ancestors of the violin are mentioned, including the viole (an instrument with strings which were rubbed with a bow). Several instruments are also mentioned which had strings which were strummed, struck, or plucked with the fingers or with a plectrum: the harp, the harpsichord (with its flat resonance chamber), the rota (triangular in shape with up to thirty strings), the mandore (similar to the mandolin), and the monochord (which had one single string). Several wind instruments are listed, including the reed pipe, which was end-blown, and the fife, which was side-blown, the cone shaped chalumeau, the musette, and the bagpipes. One of the jongleurs merely uses his lips to whistle (l. 603–610). Other texts and iconographic sources testify to the existence of a range of percussion instruments ranging from the large frame drum to small cymbals which should therefore be added to the list provided in the *Flamenca*.

Dance naturally accompanies song and music. The *Flamenca* also states that after the nobility had eaten their meal, the king would speak: “‘Lords and knights, after your squires have eaten, saddle your horses and we will have a tournament. But, in the meantime, I want the queen, with Flamenca, my sweetheart, to open the ball in courtly fashion. I will participate myself. Stand up and let the jongleurs move near the tables.’” The knights, ladies and maids, amongst whom there were some who were very pretty, immediately took each other by the hand. Never before in Britain or France had anyone seen such a beautiful dance. Two hundred jongleurs, all of them accomplished viole players, sat in pairs on the benches to beat out the rhythm without a wrong note. The ladies often looked at each other feigning amorous glances’ (l. 710–733). The role of the jongleurs was to provide rhythmic and musical accompaniment for the ball. On other occasions, the male and female jongleurs would themselves also dance, performing skilful rehearsed dances which were much appreciated by the audience.

Lastly, *Flamenca* describes other forms of entertainment used by the minstrels to amuse participants in the festivities: ‘One of them put on a

puppet show while another juggled with knives; one of them crawled on the floor and another fell over him; one of them danced and capered around while another climbed through a hoop; another of them jumped around' (l. 612–615). A more exhaustive list of such 'juggling', in the literal sense of the word, is to be found in *Morant et Galie* (1190–1210), a German song from the *Karl Meinet* cycle which recounts Charlemagne's youth. It relates how the emperor summoned 'more than four hundred minstrels, whom we call *Speleman*', to Lendit fairs, in the month of June. 'Several experts were using their hats to do magic tricks. Others were spinning plates. There were some who were playing cymbals with sticks, while others were making noises and jumping around. There were also some excellent wrestlers. Some of them organised fights between goats and horses which were ridden by monkeys. Others danced with dogs or chew pieces of stone' (l. 5169–5184). Through constant training the jongleurs, whether acrobats or animal trainers, thus fulfilled a similar role to the modern day circus. But, above all, they were proficient in voice and music, the channels through which most literary works were disseminated during the Middle Ages.

By employing jongleurs, either for the duration of festivities or more permanently in his castle, a noble might gain greater esteem from his court and guests. The importance of such prestige should not be underestimated. It increased his authority among family and friends and gained him greater respect from his enemies. The nobility almost always made direct use of the jongleurs' skills, getting them to voice messages favourable to their employer and his domination. In his *Ensenhamen* ('Teachings', i.e., 'pedagogical poem'), Garin lo Brun (d. 1156), lord of Château-neuf-de-Randon in the Gévaudan area of France, advises the lady whom he is supposed to be instructing 'to give a warm welcome to the jongleurs and minstrels so that they may be moved to speak well of you. Your name, which is your most important attribute, will thus be known and recalled, even far away, and your reputation will be enhanced everywhere, even in places you could never have imagined' (l. 541, 551–558). Through their constant travels, the jongleurs spread far and wide the latest news from the castles they visited. They could thus make or break the reputation of those who gave them either a warm or a cold reception. Lastly, performing artists could dedicate their romantic songs to whichever lady they chose, thus enhancing the reputation of female aristocrats. This was most certainly the case for the addressee of Garin's *Ensenhamen*.

The dissemination of political songs

Alongside love songs, the jongleurs' repertoire also included political songs which encouraged one military side, or political faction, while disparaging the enemy. These *sirventes* (the generic mediaeval term used to describe such songs) were composed on a one-off basis, depending on the circumstances of the conflict. Around 1200, the troubadour Peire Duran of Carpentras was clearly aware of the evolving nature of such songs when he wrote: 'My *sirventes* is in the saddle and about to set off' (l. 41–42). Once it had been entrusted to a jongleur the song would gallop away to be performed by professional singers in castles and in village squares, and then be repeated by its audience, thereby creating a genuine movement of opinion. Aware of their impact, princes and lords often asked their entourage to write such songs for them. At the beginning of his *Life of Saint Edmund* (1170–1200), Denis Piramus reminisces nostalgically over his younger days, full of fun and mischief, at the court of England: 'I wrote *sirventes*, ditties, and other songs between lovers and their mistresses' (l. 6–8). Political songs also spring naturally to the mind of his contemporary, Wace, whom Piramus would probably have met in the entourage of King Henry II. In Wace's description of his profession of 'reading cleric' in his *Roman de Rou* (III, l. 142–152), the *sirventes* are indeed prominent alongside the epic poems and histories, and all the books he translated into French.

Wace was a professional writer who boasts, somewhat exaggeratedly, to have been often congratulated by his readers (l. 158–160). The same is perhaps also true of the author of the satirical song that was sponsored by Hugh III (1162–1192), duke of Burgundy, to defame Richard the Lionheart during the latter's Third Crusade. Ambroise, a trouvère from the region of Évreux, in a long poem written around 1195 to commemorate the military exploits of the King of England in the Holy Land, describes the song as being 'full of villeiny', regretting that the song should have spread among Christian troops (l. 10653–10662). Alongside the professional writers, some knights who could write in verse were also able to improvise such songs. In his *Roman de Rou*, Wace imagines Duke Richard I of Normandy (whom he admired for loving war and knowledge in equal measure) spending his free time 'laughing, hunting, listening to jokes, and writing *sirventes*' (II, l. 4148–4149). Similarly, Walter Map makes up a story about a certain Galeran d'Ivry, an 'illiterate (*illitteratus*) knight' in the entourage of Louis VII (1137–1180). Galeran falls victim to a plot by three of the king's ministers who seek revenge for a 'song which

he wrote in French' which accused them of pocketing taxes for their own benefit. Assisted by a high-ranking lady who falsely accuses Galeran of having sung obscene canticles about herself and the king, they manage to get him exiled to England (V, 5). It would seem that Galeran d'Ivry's *sirventes* spread no further than the French court, where they stoked up enough hatred to motivate a plot of revenge.

To ensure the wide circulation of political songs, there was no alternative than to entrust them to the jongleurs. In 1190, just after having been appointed lord chancellor of England, the Norman William Longchamp (d. 1197), bishop of Ely, sought to increase his popularity. The *Chronicle* written by Roger of Howden (d. 1201), priest and officer of the royal court, preserves a copy of a letter written by Hugh Nonant (d. 1198), bishop of Coventry, criticising William's attempt at 'propaganda', before that term was invented: 'To enhance and disseminate his reputation, he prepared self-flattering poems and songs. By showering them with gifts, he persuaded singers and jongleurs from the kingdom of France to travel to England to sing the songs on his behalf. It was already said, far and wide, that he had no equal anywhere in the world' (vol. 3, p. 143). The Lord Chancellor thus employed jongleurs to disseminate messages which would strengthen his dominant position in the minds of his subjects.

In the absence of Richard the Lionheart who had left for the Crusade, William Longchamp became the supreme authority of the island. He stirred up widespread enmity, leading finally to the loss of his position. Like Longchamp, many of his rivals had as much recourse to the pen as to the sword. Gerald of Wales supported Longchamp's enemies who were led by the king's half-brother William (d. 1212), archbishop of York. In his *Life of Geoffrey* (1195), in which he expresses his admiration for the archbishop of York, leader of his faction, Gerald recognises that several advantageous *sirventes* did not prevent his rival's fall from grace: 'The jongleurs of the kingdom of France and the minstrels who were controlled by William had formerly invented many epigrams and propaganda songs to his greater glory. Conversely, nowadays, well-lettered and high-ranking individuals write countless lampoons and poems to his ignominy and embarrassment but also as an example for future generations' (II, 19). In this text, Gerald of Wales opposes, on the one hand, the vernacular songs composed by French jongleurs and, on the other, the more prestigious, according to him, Latin poems written by scholars and men of letters. This dialectical presentation goes against the bishop of Ely, whose strategy appears to be based on the popular discourse of paid entertainers. On the side of Longchamp's enemies, there were renowned 'high-ranking and

well-lettered individuals (*virī magni et litterati*)', among whom Gerald probably includes Peter of Blois. The vengeful lines of the virtuoso of Latin poetry have been preserved and begin, significantly, with *Discat cancellarius* ('The Lord Chancellor may learn', 4.3), developing the idea, detrimental to William Longchamp, that the wheel of fortune turns as quickly as popularity among the people.

Rivalry with the knights and clerics

At court, jongleurs, storytellers, and musicians lived in symbiosis with the lettered knights whose works they performed. They also transmitted their vocal, musical, and theatrical know-how to the knights who considered them as privileged sources, capable of providing them with knowledge and of teaching them performing techniques. But their role was not always acknowledged by the knights and their relations sometimes became strained, according to aristocratic writers, even if this may have been merely a form of literary jousting.³⁰ The differences between them are clearly apparent in texts from that period. Lyrical Occitan poetry openly distinguishes the troubadour, who wrote the lyrics and the melody of the songs, from the jongleur who merely sang them. The prolific Guiraut Riquier (c. 1230–1292) penned over a hundred poems which he carefully wrote out in manuscript form. In 1264, he sent a long request, in verse, to the poetry-loving King Alfonso X of Castile, asking that the word 'troubadour' be reserved for composers of songs, to the exclusion of the 'jongleurs' who merely performed them, even if, within the second category, the good singers and musicians were superior to the 'monkey tamers, puppeteers' (l. 584–585), and other such jesters. He thus demanded that those who listened to his works should not confuse the author with the mere performer. He suggests that the servile minstrel should not claim for himself successful poems, whose worth was exclusively due to himself as the inspired creator.

As in the rest of the Mediterranean region, the composers of *chansons de geste* or Occitan romances express their concern that they be distinguished, in the most elitist sense of the word, to the detriment of the jongleurs. Around 1150, the first lines of the *Couronnement de Louis*, a *chanson de geste* from the Guillaume d'Orange cycle, attacks the performer: 'I know not what a base jongleur would have to brag about since he does not pronounce a single word of this song before he is ordered to

³⁰ Menegaldo, *Le Jongleur dans la littérature narrative*, 137–141, 172–174, 185–188.

do so!’ (l. 5–6). In other words, the author has under his command a *vilains jugleres* who might, through a disastrous performance, ruin the ‘courteous and pleasant’ epic which he is so proud of. According to the anonymous writer of these lines, such churls, who merely learnt by rote and recited fixed lines rather badly, should take no initiative. Twenty years later, in the prologue to his first book, Chrétien de Troyes levels similar criticism against their carelessness. He says he is putting down on paper the ‘story of Erec, son of Lac, which is often divided up and altered in front of kings and counts by those who live from the profession of storytelling’ (l. 19–22). Very different from the imprecise performance of the professional entertainers, the author’s text claims to contain the only truth.

According to the author, his superiority over the performer not only corresponds to poetic hierarchy. It is also consistent with social status. The lettered knight, as a lay writer, was from the nobility. He could not therefore lower himself to beg reward for his art. On the contrary, along with the audience to his work, he customarily supported the jongleur with his generosity. And indeed, the professional entertainers performed on stage for a fee. In his *History of Philip Augustus*, Rigord (1145–1208), a monk from Saint-Denis, protests against the huge sums that the entertainers could earn in a few hours, making the following bitter remarks: ‘In the past we have witnessed some princes wasting twenty or thirty *marcs* on wonderfully flower-embroidered clothes which took a long time in the making, and which they then gave, after having worn them for barely seven days, to some jongleurs, those ministers of the devil, just for opening their mouths’ (§52). Some grasping performers attempt to extract money from their hosts in ways which are not always perfectly honest: ‘Like vultures over a carcass, or like flies over a sweet liqueur [...], the jongleurs, dancers, musicians, and prostitutes come together at the princely courts. Like leeches, they will not release their grip until they are gorged with blood’ (p. 426). These lines are taken from a writing manual written around 1275 by Conrad of Mure (c. 1210–1281), cantor of Zurich Cathedral. He evokes the admonitions addressed a century earlier to Raimond, lord of Amboise, by the scholar Bernard Silvestre, who trained at Chartres and professed at Tours. In a letter advising him on how to run his house, Silvestre writes: ‘A man who was fond of jongleurs immediately married a woman called “Poverty” who gave him a son called “Derision” or “Confusion” (p. 4). Basically, and sometimes at considerable cost, the knights provided board and lodging, but also lavish presents and huge sums of money, to minstrels who were closely dependent on them for their subsistence.

It was in the greater interest of the nobility that the jongleurs compose and spread songs which enhanced their reputation. Such publicity came at a price. 'Those who write *chansons de geste* and tell stories often receive lavish gifts from barons and noble ladies, and in exchange put the names of their benefactors in their tales, so that they may be eternally remembered', writes Wace, when evoking his profession as a writer or 'reading cleric' in his *Roman de Rou* (III, l. 145–150). Any miserliness is immediately censured. Lambert d'Ardres explains in the *Song of Antioch* why Arnoul II (d. 1139) of Ardres' exploits during the First Crusade were never written down. According to Lambert, the reason for this omission was Arnoul's refusal to give a pair of scarlet shoes to the jongleur who wrote down the text (§130). But the writer's revenge was perhaps merely a survival strategy. Around the year 1240, in his *Tournoiement de l'Antéchrist* ('Antichrist's tournament'), a psychomachia in which vices and virtues confront each other in allegorical form, Huon de Méry describes the minstrels' difficulties and hardships by putting the following exclamation in their mouths: 'If generosity should die, we will die, all of us, from poverty and misery!' (p. 72). This formulation perfectly expresses their need for patrons to provide for their subsistence.

Even if the knights too sometimes performed, like the jongleur, in front of the same courtly audience, their motivations were quite different. Through performance, the knights sought prestige, admiration, and reputation, whereas the jongleurs merely sought to provide themselves with sustenance and clothing, or perhaps even, by outrageous means, to gain wealth. At the beginning of the *Song of the Albigeian Crusade* (1210–1214), Guilhem de Tudèle laments in the third person: 'Master Guilhem composed this song in Montauban. If he had been as lucky as a demented jongleur or many other bad men, some valiant and courtly noblemen would have given him a Breton palfrey [...] or silk clothes, a brocaded silk cloak or luxury gold brocade' (§9, l. 26–32). Guilhem is admittedly a cleric, but he nevertheless shares the lay aristocratic writers' disdain for the venality of the actors whom he reduces to the level of mere ruffians. Hendrik van Veldeke, a writer of romances, has his hero warrior pronounce a similarly sharp distinction between the altruistic artists and the greedy performers: 'After having announced his marriage in public, Énée declared that he would not disappoint those who preferred to take money (*guot*) rather than honour (*êre*)' (§336, l. 1–5). This expression, opposing money against honour, was adopted in the German language of that period to designate the profession of the jongleurs, who gave up the reputation that their work could have brought them, and even any social respect and

recognition, in exchange for a salary.³¹ They demeaned themselves by lowering poetic creation to the level of trivial material considerations. Typical of a certain aristocratic attitude at that period, such disdain for money—which instead of being spent for ostentatious and festive purposes went towards the greater enrichment of the minstrels or of merchants—provides a glimpse of how virulent the nobility's attacks against them could be.

Even when they were relieved from poverty for a certain length of time, thanks to their admirers' gifts, the jongleurs occupied a precarious position at court. They were completely dependent on those who were wealthier and more powerful than themselves, and were subordinated to them. The aristocratic troubadours would use irony to remind the jongleurs of this predicament, composing *sirventes jonglarescs*, satirical songs which were intended to ridicule the minstrels—the latter getting their own back through retaliatory lines in accordance with the practice of the *tenso*, or *jeu parti*. A classic example of the genre was written around 1200 by Bertran de Born against Mailolin, 'born under a bad star' (XL, l. 1), who came to request a song from the former. There follows a list of insults against the hypocritical, boring jongleur whom he describes as 'more stupid than a sheep' (l. 10); whose voice has totally gone ('the crow sings more clearly than you do' (l. 11); who is cowardly and a poor fighter among the troop of travelling minstrels; who is lazy, sleepy, heartless, but who has huge lungs and an enormous liver; a glutton hastening after the smell of roast meat and greedily gulping down kidney... The final line, in which the troubadour says he prefers another jongleur, is all the crueller: 'I want Raimon de Planel to have the *sirventes*, rather than you, for he is brave [...], for you sing worse than a peacock and you spoil the lyrics and the music. Only a lunatic would entrust his songs to you!' The criticism of the poor interpretation of a work which deprives its author of his due recognition and glory, is quite usual in medieval literature. Bertran de Born adds to it a list of vices which highlight the laziness and the gluttony of those who take advantage of the court.

Around 1240, Bertran de Lamanon (c. 1210–c. 1270) sent a *sirventes joglaresc* to Gui de Cabannes, disdainfully listing the subordinate tasks that the latter had to carry out at the court of Raimond Berenguer V (1209–1245), count of Provence: as courier, sergeant-at-arms, jongleur, and '*cavalier sauvage*' ('wild horseman'), the latter an expression which may perhaps designate the jester's disguise as an animal, or, perhaps, to

³¹ Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 504.

judge by the lines which follow, a crier (XII, l. 1–8). Less flattering still is Bertran's poem against Granet, another jongleur, who had previously told the former that he intended to blackmail him: 'You are a mere ruffian, born of a prostitute. I pulled you out of the river. You should rightfully share with me those things you squeeze out of other people' (XVIII, l. 13–16). And he adds: 'I made you a jongleur when you were nothing more than a little foot page' (l. 28–29). The humorous side to this heap of insults, proffered in public probably during a literary evening gathering, may indeed have cushioned the malicious intent. The scornful attitude of the upper classes is nonetheless abundantly clear.

The jongleurs did not always remain silent against the troubadours, whose attacks were all too ruthless despite the comic context. Moreover, the *jeu parti* genre required that the jongleurs' riposte be equally cruel towards their verbal aggressor. Gui de Cabannes replies to the troubadour that while he may have become a crier, he never had the opportunity to pronounce 'Lamanon', the war-cry of the pusillanimous Bertran, who should change his cry to 'villeiny', 'weakness', or 'cowardice'. He pursues his riposte by suggesting that Bertran 'offer up venomous words rather than banquets or gifts' (XII, l. 25–27). In the dividing up of the family heritage, his brother inherited the virtues, leaving Bertran with all the vices and 'a large, spineless body, filled with cowardice' (l. 36). Like Gui, Granet criticises Bertran for being a miser, paying him so poorly for his loyal services that he turns to blackmail to obtain his just rewards. To the troubadour's retort concerning his flaws, Granet claims to have learnt from Bertran 'spinelessness, greed, and plenty more vices' (XVIII, l. 18–19). He finds it disgusting to have to utter 'praise for such a flabby person' (l. 35). It is quite natural for the two jongleurs to criticise Bertran's weakness and pusillanimity, in complete contrast to the brave knighthood which he is supposed to represent. In similar vein, they unashamedly express their contempt for his avarice, quite the opposite of the aristocratic generosity which provided a living for those who shared their profession.

The harshness of the jongleurs' remarks against their patrons needs to be considered as part of a comic routine which significantly reduces the aggressiveness and intention. Mockery of this sort was part of the courtly jester's job: to express out loud thoughts about those in positions of power that were generally kept quiet. Laughter thus became a means of exorcising fears which might otherwise have led to violence. It was a safety valve which prevented outbursts of tension, revolt, and sedition. In September 1211, while he was unsuccessfully bombarding and laying siege to Cas-

telnaudary, a town held by Simon de Montfort (d. 1218), Count Raimond VI of Toulouse (1194–1222) was made fun of by ‘his jongleur’. In the fashion of a court jester, he criticised Raimond for having used his catapult to no effect. Like all missile weapons, catapults were criticised by the knights as a cowardly way of avoiding hand to hand combat. His jongleur pointed out the bravery of the crusaders who went so far as to storm the tents which harboured the enemy troops. He concludes with the following phrase: ‘If only Castelnaudary town walls were made of iron to prevent them from attacking you!’ (§261). The veracity of this anecdote is far from certain. It is handed down to us only by the Cistercian monk Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay (d. 1218), the faithful reporter of Simon de Montfort’s exploits who followed the latter’s troops. Elsewhere, his *Albigesian History* describes the count of Toulouse going to mass accompanied by a jester whom he asks to parody the movements of the officiating priest (§35). This anticlerical prank is reminiscent of the fools’ day which took place annually on 28 December, the ‘Day of the Innocent Saints’, during which the choir boys provided derisive imitation of their elders. While these two anecdotes may seem implausible, they nevertheless provide a reliable indication of the carnivalistic nature of the jesters’ activities, whose miming and jokes provided temporary and playful challenge to those in power. They also suggest that the professional entertainers were never short of arguments against those in power whom they ridiculed so often.

Various anecdotes have been embroidered around disputes between performers and masters which went beyond words and which were often ruthless in nature. One such anecdote is to be found in Boncompagno da Signa’s *Ancient Rhetoric* (1215), in a chapter which contains several model letters for musicians, acrobats, singers, and jongleurs wishing to offer their services to a potential patron. The anecdote involves Guido Guerra I (1099–1133), palatine count of Tuscany, who was famed for his cruelty. He makes brutal use of the satirical nicknames often used for jongleurs: he forces ‘Pie’ (‘Magpie’) to throw himself from a tree and fly; he puts Male-nuit (‘Bad Night’) naked on a rooftop on a freezing winter evening; he burns Mal-au-corps (‘Body Pain’) skin and rubs it with pig bristle; he tonsures ‘Abbot’. When a hundred or so rural jongleurs demand to be paid for their services during Paschal Triduum, he has them surrounded by bonfires which singe their beards, hair, and clothes (6.8.12); and so on.

In such a context it is unsurprising that the entertainers should seek to take revenge on their masters in picaresque fashion, or, as a last resort, on

any of their fellow jongleurs whom they consider to be overly submissive. Also in Tuscany, the *Novellino*, a collection of Italian tales from the end of the thirteenth century, describes how one jongleur criticizes another for excessively adoring his master and calling him God. Certain that his master will protect him, the latter gives his colleague a severe beating for the insulting reproach. News of the incident spreads and his master is asked to get rid of the toady. In accordance with custom, the master gives him a pie filled with gold coins to indicate that he is dismissed. But the wicked minstrel is overconfident of his master's loyalty and naively gives the pie away to his scrawny colleague who discovers the treasure on arriving home and runs off with the booty. The sycophant thus loses both his position at court and his fortune (§75). These two stories provide clear examples of the tensions which sometimes existed between jongleurs and their masters.

A more positive image

Rigord, Conrad of Mure, and Bernard Silvestre's criticisms of the 'ministers of the devil', or the 'leeches', bring to mind, certainly in a more serious register, the jibes formulated against minstrels by troubadours and by the writers of romances. These, moreover, are just a tiny sample of the ecclesiastical recriminations against actors, some of which are extremely violent. In his *Elucidarium*, written around 1100, Honorius Augustodunensis says as follows: 'What hope is there for the jongleurs? None. Because in the depths of their souls, they are the ministers of Satan. It is said of them that they do not know God and that God will despise them, for he will laugh at those who laugh' (II, 58). It should be added that Augustodunensis was hardly more compassionate towards the knights or the merchants whom he also considers destined for certain damnation unless they undergo radical conversion. Prejudice against performers was not only based on the idea of the waste which their professions involved. Many other preconceptions were shaped, exaggerated, and transmitted by an age-old tradition of prejudice. This went at least as far back as the Stoics, who were as partisan towards moderation and measure in speech as they were hostile towards the clowning antics, imitation, mimicry, and gesticulation of the Roman *histriones*. Such attitudes were relayed at the end of the fourth century by Augustine of Hippo—his criticism against the pagan games of the circus and the theatre is ruthless—and by Jerome of Stridon who considered that 'offering gifts to actors was sacrificing to idols'. For these two intellectuals, the word and the body were God's two most pre-

cious gifts to mankind and the facetious and indecent jongleurs made disgraceful use of both, in sacrilegious fashion, to obtain unhealthy laughter from their audience.³²

Nevertheless, around 1200 the image of the entertainers improved. An increasing number of theologians accepted the legitimacy of their profession, on condition that it was exercised in accordance with Christian ethics. They also began to distinguish, more subtly than in the past, between 'jonglerie' *per se*, which was indeterminate as a category, and the way in which it was practiced, which might or might not be reprehensible, depending on the jongleur in question. Peter the Chanter accepted professionals who sang old and moving stories in order to bring good feelings into the human heart. His contemporaries, Stephen of Tournai (d. 1203) and Stephen Langton (d. 1228), cardinal and archbishop of Canterbury, were of the same opinion, asserting that the *histrion* merely recited 'history', a prestigious and well-respected art, while simultaneously gesticulating. At the same period, the founding of the mendicant orders facilitated the rehabilitation of the jongleurs. Like the latter, the members of the mendicant orders also led an itinerant lifestyle, received alms, and made theatrical appearances in public, admittedly for preaching purposes. Saint Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) sang in troubadour style, imitated the viol player, and called himself 'God's jongleur'. His disciple, Alexander of Hales (c. 1185–1245), praised the harp-playing King David, who danced out of humility in front of the Ark of the Covenant. Roger Bacon (1214–1294), another Franciscan, was also favourable to the new form of preaching which disregarded classical level-headedness in order to touch an emotional chord.

The Dominican Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274) carefully examined the morality of the minstrel's office and found it to be legitimate, seeing that its function was to render more agreeable the breaks from work during which all workers revived their energies. The jongleur thus enlivened rest periods, which had undeniably beneficial effects. The office must, however, be exercised with moderation, without yielding to unhealthy pleasures. At the same time, it merited just rewards. This attitude was the antithesis of the sort of peremptory condemnation which had previously classed the jongleurs as the henchmen of Satan. This development was part of the new pastoral attitude which required a more demanding spiritual and sacramental life from all laymen, regardless of

³² Schmitt, *La Raison des gestes*, 43–44, 266–273, Casagrande and Vecchio, 'Clerics et jongleurs'.

their profession.³³ The sensibility of the thirteenth-century clerics was thus much more favourable towards the jongleurs, a trend coinciding with the rise of vernacular literature and increasing numbers of performers interpreting such literature. This also demonstrates that the struggle between the ecclesiastical intellectuals and the entertainers was not as fierce as it might at first appear.

As with their relations to the clerics, the relations between the knights and the jongleurs must not be viewed uniquely through the lens of conflict. Here again, dialogue prevailed over conflict. The noble troubadour had no hesitation in transmitting his knowledge to his jongleur. Around 1200, Guerau IV of Cabrera, viscount of Gerona, wrote his *Ensenhamens*, containing the greater part of his literary knowledge, intending the ensemble for Cabra, the performer of his works, whose name referred ironically to 'goat' and also, subserviently, to his master's surname. The contrary was also true, for many jongleurs had to teach their masters to sing, to play an instrument, or to learn new pieces by heart. There are many examples of jongleurs who became troubadours, foremost among them Cercamon and Marcabru, two of the very first known creators of Occitan poetry at the beginning of the twelfth century. Moving down the social ladder, at least five knights described in their medieval biographies (which admittedly are not always reliable) as 'poor', earned a living in similar fashion to the minstrels. Raimbaut de Vaqueiras (d. 1207) belonged to this group. The same is also true for a handful of clerics, such as Montaudon, a monk who regularly left his abbey to sing in public, returning afterwards to share his earnings with his fellow monks. The goliards, a group of poor anti-establishment clerics who were at odds with the Church and who lived by their wits, would seem to have been less faithful to their calling. Their level of education often allowed them to compose and interpret songs, or to tell stories in exchange for a few pennies.³⁴ There were thus several potential crossover points which allowed the clerics and the knights to swell the ranks of the jongleurs, if only temporarily, in order to earn a little money and thereby regain their lost status.

The difference in terms of motivation between the knight and the jongleur may have been significant, but the stage on which they performed was identical. The monk Orderic Vitalis remarked that 'the very joyous' William IX (1086–1126) 'exceeded the most amusing jongleurs with his

³³ Schmitt, *ibid.*, 261–273; Baldwin, 'The Image of the Jongleur'; Menegaldo, *Le Jongleur dans la littérature narrative*, 474–477.

³⁴ Zumthor, *La Lettre et la voix*, 65–66.

many jokes' despite the fact that he was duke of Aquitaine (vol. 5, p. 324). This was not a demeaning comparison for a person of such high rank: in the same passage Vitalis also praises his bravery and integrity during the Crusade. Geoffrey of Monmouth writes in similar vein of his invented character Bledgabred, king of England, 'superior to singers of bygone days in his voice and melodious playing of instruments: they called him the king of jongleurs' (§52). Wace subsequently exaggerates this passage when translating it into Anglo-Norman in his *Roman de Brut* (1155): 'Beldgabred knew more about the nature of song than anyone. He had mastery of all instruments and of the whole repertoire of songs. He knew much about lays and melodies. He had learnt to play the vielle, the psalter-harp, the harp, the cithara, the lyre, and the psaltery. He therefore sang so well that during his lifetime he was called the king of jongleurs and of all singers. He was very witty and all those who served him did so joyfully, for he was always good tempered and never angry' (l. 3694–3709). Thus, even though they were held in contempt for their social status, the jongleurs possessed enviable artistic abilities and many high-ranking individuals sought to reach their levels of musical skill.

English historiography of the twelfth century preserves a number of anecdotes describing warriors who borrowed jongleurs' clothes in order to deceive their enemies and spy on them. In his *Chronicle of the Kings of England*, William of Malmesbury describes how Alfred the Great (849–901) disguised himself as a mime artist to be able to stay for a whole week in the banquet room of the king of Denmark, his chief foe, thereby penetrating all his secrets (§121). The same chronicler tells a similar story of the Vikings against the Anglo-Saxons when he claims that the Viking king Anlaf listened, harp in hand, to conversations in King Athelstan's (924–939) tent. Athelstan was Alfred the Great's grandson. The repetition, and also the use of disguise by an Englishman and by a Dane, indicate the story's fictive nature. Geoffrey of Monmouth—who took advantage, as did William of Malmesbury, of Robert of Gloucester's patronage—introduces a similar plot. In his *History of the Kings of Britain*, the Saxon prince Badulf uses the same stratagem to deceive the Bretons who were laying siege to the town walls of York, enabling him to get close to the walls and to be lifted up with ropes: 'He shaved off his hair and beard and played the harp like a jongleur. He crossed the enemy camp on foot, pretending to be a harp player by composing melodies on his lyre' (§143). Despite its historiographic claims, this theme has fed into literature, as is demonstrated by the characters of Renart or Tristan, who deceive their rivals by disguising themselves as jongleurs. The theme highlights the

artistic skills of some of the lettered knights who distinguish themselves as much during courtly evenings as they do on the battlefield. Their craftiness is no less worthy than Ulysses', in accordance with the classical opposition between *fortitudo* and *sapientia*.

One character in particular, though probably legendary, provides a perfect example of the knight-jongleur, or better still, the jongleur-knight: Taillefer, famed for his involvement in the Battle of Hastings (1066). He appears for the first time in a 835 hexameter (or pentameter) Latin poem written by Guy (1058–1075), bishop of Amiens, shortly after the victory: 'An entertainer, whose excessively audacious heart was not without noble qualities, preceded the Duke's large number of troops, encouraged the Gauls, and terrified the Angles with his words; he juggled with his sword and threw it up into the air' (l. 391–394). He was the first to push his horse towards the Anglo-Saxon lines where he killed an enemy, holding up his decapitated head like a trophy. Around 1135, Geoffrey Gaymar's *History of the English* picks up on the same anecdote of Taillefer's rash deeds, but with more empathy for the Anglo-Saxons, who kill the 'jongleur, a bold and noble vassal, who had weapons and a good horse' (l. 5268–5270). Thirty years later, however, in his *Roman de Rou*, Wace no longer explicitly describes him as a jongleur: 'Taillefer, who sang very well, mounted a speedy horse in front of the Duke, singing of Charlemagne, Roland, Olivier, and other vassals who fell at Roncesvalles' (III, l. 8013–8018). His steed, as well as his sword and lance which he handles so skilfully, now suggest that he is just another knight in the Duke's army.

Taillefer encourages the Normans and frightens the Anglo-Saxons by the ease with which he lethally juggles his weapons, a form of provocation which is well-attested in the ancient battles of the British Celts. His exhortations, and the song of Roland, are also supposed to lead William the Conqueror's troops to victory. Taillefer's suicidal audacity leads him to the first success of the day, according to authors favourable to the Normans, but also, according to the Anglo-Saxon chroniclers, to his death. This may perhaps attest the jongleurs' inexperience of actual warfare. Normally their role was limited to singing warlike songs, intended to encourage their side. Their wind and percussion instruments sounded assembly, march, attack, or retreat, while also frightening the enemy horses. Some uncertainty remains, however, regarding the exact status of these sword acrobats, singers, and musicians, since the knights could also acquire the same skills. Conversely, jongleurs accompanying troops sometimes found themselves cornered and forced in extreme circumstances to use weapons. Taillefer's name is in itself aggressive—in French it sug-

gests sharpening of iron—and therefore suggests military activity.³⁵ The same nickname was also attributed to a handful of princes and epic heroes during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Paradoxically then, war brought the professional combatant and the jongleur closer together.

The knights and the minstrels shared a taste for travel. The former left for distant military expeditions which might take them as far abroad as the Holy Land in the case of a Crusade. Similarly, their pilgrimages to Rome, on the way of Saint James, or to Jerusalem, took them far from home. The minstrels, if they were unable to renew their repertoire, had to walk constantly from court to court to find new audiences, and at times they gravitated towards certain grand events or meetings. This was the case for the large royal festive occasions to which princes, ambassadors, and noblemen from the whole Western world were invited. At Pentecost 1184, to announce his Crusade and also for the dubbing ceremony of one of his sons, Frederick Barbarossa brought together, in Mainz, a huge crowd from several kingdoms. According to the *Sächsische Weltchronik* (c. 1230), there were 40,000 people present. This is undoubtedly a fanciful figure. It is true, however, that many imperial princes went to the event, accompanied by large retinues: among them were Henry the Lion (one of Frederick's former enemies), Ludwig III of Thuringia, Leopold V of Austria (1157–1194) and Philip of Heinsberg (1167–1191), archbishop of Cologne. They and their entourages stayed in the town or in the nearby countryside. In addition to the customary tents, luxurious wooden lodges and even a chapel were specifically built to house the visitors. Jousting and tournaments were among the more popular entertainments organised for them.³⁶

A large number of jongleurs travelled to Mainz from the whole of the Romano-German Empire, but in particular from France. The writer Hendrik van Veldeke claims to have been at the event: 'I never heard mention anywhere of such a magnificent celebration as that of Aeneas' wedding, except the meeting in Mainz, which I saw with my own eyes [...]. The Emperor Frederick gained such a reputation from the event that wonderful things will be said about him until Judgement Day. A hundred years hence, people will still be speaking and writing about him' (§347–348). In 1206, the monk Guiot de Provins, who had been a trouvère during his younger days, claimed in his *Bible*: 'As regards Emperor Frederick, I

³⁵ Menegaldo, *Le Jongleur dans la littérature narrative*, 109–116, 648–650, Storelli, *Le Chevalier et la mort*, vol. 1, 5–6, 203–206.

³⁶ Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 203–207, Zotz, 'El mundo caballeresco', 193–197.

may tell you that I saw him at the court he held in Mainz. Let it be known that no one ever saw the likes of his court' (l. 277–81).

The number of jongleurs and knights was proportionate to the size of the event. Henry, bishop of Strasbourg adopts a critical tone against the presence of such a number of entertainers in a meeting which he considers should only be religious. When preaching to knights in order to convince them to take the crusading vow, he expressed the following reproach, according to the *History of the Pilgrims*, written in Latin by an anonymous Swabian author shortly before the year 1200: 'A mime performance or a play appeal to you and hold your attention much more than the word of God, which you entertain with deaf and closed minds' (p. 123). Through such ostentatious munificence the Emperor probably wished to compensate for the failure of his Italian campaigns. He attempted to gather round his banner all his vassals whom he wanted to bring with him on a Crusade. His reconciliation with Henry the Lion, whom he had brought back from his Norman exile, symbolised his desire for peaceful relations at home before leaving for the Holy Land. He entreated his banquet guests to swear peace and concord. The festive event enhanced his prestige and, even further, his authority over the imperial princes and their knights whose mere presence around him was a manifestation of their feudal submission.

There are many examples of similar gatherings, admittedly of a much more modest size than the court in Mainz. In April 1176, King Alfonso II of Aragon (1162–1196), count of Barcelona and of Provence, and Raymond V (1148–1194), count of Toulouse, met on the island of Jarnègues, in the river Rhône, between Tarascon and Beaucaire, which were their respective strongholds. Through their meeting, they intended to put an end to the long war between their courts. The chronicler Geoffrey of Vigeois (d. 1148) records the exaggerated figure of 10,000 people gathering to conclude the peace agreement. He describes, in such a hyperbolic vein, the 'vain celebrations' which followed. It was a case of 'which of the two tyrants would celebrate his name in the most frivolous fashion'. Count Raymond gave 100,000 sous to Raimond d'Agoult who 'munificently' shared them out equally among one hundred knights. Another noble, Bertrand Raimbaud, had the town squares of Beaucaire ploughed by twelve pairs of oxen and sowed 30,000 sous under the ground. Guillaume le Gros, viscount of Marseilles, surrounded by three hundred of his knights, ordered that their meal be cooked by expensive wax candles. Another aristocrat burnt thirty horses. According to the chronicler, he did this just to show off his riches 'out of conceit' (§69). Under his monastic pen,

vainglory, in this case in the arrogant and self-satisfied form of sterile destruction, was characteristic of the worldly aristocracy who were prepared to make great sacrifice of their possessions in order to shine within their milieu, and to cast away the wealth which could have been used as alms to feed the poor or build churches.

From his distant Vigeois priory in the Limousin region, Geoffroi speaks only from hearsay. At that period, in the Bas-Rhône region where Geoffroi places the event, a horse cost between sixty and three hundred sous,³⁷ which calls into question his exorbitant claims. But the importance of this account lies elsewhere than in the veracity of these improbable claims regarding the extravagance of the Provencal nobility. It throws light on a particular characteristic of aristocratic mentalities: generosity. Even if Geoffroi expresses his disapproval of such futile waste, as a son of a Limousin village lord (Le Breuil), he is nevertheless fascinated by these aristocrats. The same chapter of his *Chronicle* immediately afterwards praises the futile expenditure by which the duke of Aquitaine and the viscount of Ventadour attempt to impress each other. Such flaunting of wealth and gratuitous destruction of goods was a reflection of rivalry among the nobility who competed with each other in extravagance, engaging in a veritable potlatch-type ceremony.³⁸ The jongleurs made the most of such generosity. Geoffroi adds that a countess, perhaps Douce de Foix (d. 1209), wife of Ermengol VII d'Urgell (1154–1184), sent a crown worth 40,000 sous to the assembly of Beaucaire, to be handed over to the 'king of all the jongleurs'. He claims that the prize was awarded to Guillaume Mita, despite the fact that the latter was absent from the occasion. Thus it appears that the minstrels took pride of place at the great festive events where the nobility gathered. Sometimes jongleurs travelled considerable distances to attend these meetings.

The journeys of certain knights are reminiscent, in many respects, of the jongleurs' wanderings. Bleddri ap Cadifor (c. 1080–c. 1140) was the most well-known of the Welsh polyglot bards of the time. At the end of the twelfth century, in *Tristan*, Thomas of England regrets the fact that storytellers no longer tell this story 'in the manner of Bleddri, who knew the songs and tales of all the kings and counts who lived in Britain' (l. 850–3). In his *Description of Wales* (1193–1194), Gerald of Wales

³⁷ *Cartulaire de Trinquetaille*, 48, number 56 (1160–1167), 113, number 129 (I 1169); *Cartulaire du prieuré de Saint-Gilles*, 109, number 134, (3 VI 1201).

³⁸ The potlatch is a Native American custom of destruction and waste of goods, such as food or furs.

describes him as *famosus ille fabulator*, which should be translated as ‘that famous storyteller’ or, perhaps with a touch of irony, as ‘famous liar’. In order to explain the Welsh fishermen’s custom of carrying their small boats from one river to another, he reproduces a comic description of one of Bleddri’s witticisms. ‘There are some people among us who, when they set off in search of booty, carry their horses on their shoulders to the place which they will pillage: they then mount them and, as soon as they have taken their spoils, carry them back home again on their backs’ (I, 17).

Bleddri ap Cadifor belonged to the royal house of Dyfed, the most westerly of the five Welsh principalities. He maintained good neighbourly relationships with the Norman conquerors. In 1116, the Norman invaders even entrusted him with the safekeeping of the castle of Aber Cofwy or Laugharne, thirteen kilometres from Carmarthen, the mythical village of Merlin. His cooperation with the Normans is also exemplified by his performing for them the function of *latimer* or *latinier* (‘translator’). Since he spoke both Welsh and French, Bleddri was able to travel on the continent, exercising his storytelling talents in various courts. Such at least is the claim made by certain manuscripts of Wauchier de Denain’s *Second Continuation of the Grail*: ‘I want to present you with the deeds [of Perceval] as told by Bleddri, who was born and conceived in Wales. I am recounting his tale, which he recited to count [William IX] of Poitiers, who liked this story and who kept it, better than anyone else, in his memory’ (p. 392, variations in the footnotes). According to this Wauchier’s anecdote, Bleddri was remembered for the quality of his storytelling performances and for his mastery of the Celtic repertoire. Even if his trip to the Poitou region might appear to be that of a mere jongleur, he was a member of the high-ranking aristocracy. He was thus probably brought there with great pomp and ceremony by William IX.³⁹ In Celtic society during antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the priestly caste of the druids, masters of the word and repositories of collective memory, belonged to the nobility. The bards, who were often from the same social background, took over from the druids. To sum up, while they may have been socially far apart, the lettered knights and the jongleurs shared a common culture and similar performances.

Princes, clerics, knights, and jongleurs all lived at the same court. A strong female presence was another characteristic of these palaces. The

³⁹ James, ‘Bleddri ap Cadifor’; Gallais, ‘Bleheri, la cour de Poitiers’; Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 212–217.

knights' *aula*, the clerics *capella*, and the women's *camera* all contained more corridors than walls. Indeed, these three areas were not hermetically sealed off, but were rather meeting places in which the various strands of aristocratic culture came together. From the banquet hall to the ladies' rooms, through the chapels or the watchtowers, the various parts of the castle had multiple functions. War, justice, and the needs of administration were as influential in the shaping of castle architecture as its festive functions. In these places bureaucracy by no means excluded entertainment, nor did pragmatic writing prevent literary creation.

Both seignorial and 'fiscal' (state) levying of peasants, craftsmen, and merchants increased during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the context of strengthening monarchy. The fruits of such levying were temporarily placed in the castle cellars or storeroom, to be subsequently enjoyed by the aristocrats. At their banquets, tournaments, and numerous assemblies such fruits were squandered, sometimes with the haughty extravagance of a potlatch. Such largesse was a key element among noble values, binding the nobility together in a continuous series of festivities and socialising. It wove links of patronage in increasingly complex networks. The jongleurs, who took ample advantage of such munificence, were part and parcel of these networks no less than the vassals or the serfs. The jongleurs' skills, acquired through much training, were highly prized by the nobility who took them into their service. The lettered knights, whose contempt for professional entertainers may have been partly due to jealousy, were fascinated by such skills. Indeed, their professed contempt did not prevent them from engaging in a certain mimetic rivalry, since they too enjoyed shining in evening gatherings in front of lords, ladies, clerics, and other warriors.

During gatherings in the main hall or in the ladies' room, the nobility's participation in singing, the playing of musical instruments, or other vocal entertainment helped considerably to reduce tensions. Whether tragic, dramatic, or comic in nature, fiction provided an outlet for the tensions arising from the plotting and scheming at court. The court produced such conflicts because it was the seat of power *par excellence*. This was the reason the court required collective festivities, thereby allowing for a temporary relaxing of the mask behind which the courtiers so often hid their ambitions. The courtier's momentary emotion, smile, or laughter during an artistic performance helped to relax the general atmosphere in the castle. During such festivities, conviviality grudges were often set aside in favour of shared enjoyment. Such momentary feelings of happiness demanded a constant renewal of literary works which were increasingly authored by the knights during this period.

THE KNIGHT WRITERS

The course of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries saw a sharp increase in the number of lay writers. Whether poets, authors of romances, chroniclers, or writers of memoirs, they often belonged to knighthood, a new situation that coincided with the rise of vernacular literature. Whilst clerks usually favoured writing in Latin, noblemen would opt rather for their native tongue, even though a few of them did produce works in Latin, even outside Italy where that language was more frequently used. Such was probably the case of Walter the Chancellor, who was in charge of the drafting of acts for the prince of Antioch in the early twelfth century. In his *Antiochene Wars*, he relates in great detail—and in Latin—the history of the north of the Holy Land in 1114–1115 and 1119–1122. He was present at the Battle of the Field of Blood in 1119 (most likely as a soldier, but we cannot be sure), where the winners, the Turks, took him prisoner and kept him locked up in Aleppo. The biblical references in his book—together with his frequent allusions to the crusaders' piety and to divine will—do not rule out, however, his belonging to the clergy, albeit perhaps the minor orders.⁴⁰ Gervase of Tilbury (c. 1150–1230), who was married, wrote his *Recreation for an Emperor* in Latin, but then he had most certainly been tonsured in youth. Paulin Piper (d. 1251), another knight who was married, and a councillor to Henry III, wrote poetry that is lost today, but most likely in Latin, on George, the warrior saint and protector of England. These three examples remain exceptions because of the unclear canonical status—at least in their youth—of Walter, Gervase, and Paulin. Whatever their condition may have been, the three of them were the proverbial exceptions proving the rule that the writing of Latin books was indeed a clerical privilege, except in Italy where a number of knights did leave historiographical, rhetorical, and legal works in that language.

Some noble figures have been misleadingly claimed to be the authors of books in Latin. In 1096, Foulque IV le Réchin (1068–1109), count of Anjou, said he had wanted to 'commit to letters' his *Genealogy*, a brief writing in Latin which in actual fact he must have merely dictated to a clerk who then translated it. Again in praise of the same lineage, in 1158 Hugues de Claye, a knight from the Angers area and a courtier of Henry II of England, asserted his authorship of the *Hegemony of the Senechal in*

⁴⁰ Asbridge and Edgington, 'Introduction' to the English translation of Walter the Chancellor, 5–6.

France, a writing based on a history written by Foulque V of Anjou (1109–1143), king of Jerusalem. In this booklet, he sets out to demonstrate that Robert the Strong (d. 866), a forebear of the Capetians, had once granted the command of his army on a hereditary basis, together with supremacy over other French princes, to Geoffrey Grisegonelle, a forebear of the counts of Anjou. Like the *Genealogy*, the *Hegemony* is characteristically short and simple in style, with no rhetorical pretence whatsoever. It was composed in praise of the Angevins within a curial milieu that certainly did not lack Latinists to churn out propaganda writings in support of the counts.

The above-mentioned works show that a few knights, having attended cathedral schools or universities in youth, did have a sufficient grasp of Latin to write prose and even poetry in the language normally reserved for the clergy. If need be, they could always ask clerks—who were more fluent in Latin—for help with their writing. However, the scarcity of warriors familiar with Cicero's language had proportionate negative repercussions on their literary compositions. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, almost all their songs, romances, and memoirs were characterized by the use of the vernacular. The mother tongue was particularly well-suited to curial sociability, which will first be presented from the angle of poetic creation. Then, a classification of their writings by genre will provide new insights into the extent of this new sociolinguistic phenomenon.

Songs: a preference for the brief genre

At the end of the twelfth century, in the *History of Geoffrey Plantagenet*, the monk John of Marmoutier tells of Josselin de Tours, seneschal of the count of Anjou, lamenting the plight of four knights from Poitou whom he has locked up in his dungeons. As he knows them to come from a land where 'composing verses comes easily, almost naturally to mind', he asks them to prepare songs in honour of Geoffrey, whom he has invited to a splendid banquet. At the end of the meal, the starving and bedraggled prisoners sing their compositions from the windows of a tower. As a lover of poetry, the count of Anjou is deeply moved, and remarks 'that as a knight, he must have mercy on fellow knights'; he sets them free, after receiving their pledge to never fight him again (pp. 194–196). John's narrative is interesting in two respects: first, it provides evidence that there were warriors who could compose and interpret songs. Second, it bears witness to Poitou's prestige in the field: it is the homeland of William IX

of Aquitaine (1086–1126), the first known troubadour ('he who finds or invents poems'), whose court used to attract (c. 1100) the most illustrious *langue d'oc* poets.

The troubadours on love and war

There exist lavish manuscripts, mainly designed for the thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Italian and Languedoc aristocracy, that among others contain a collection of some 2,500 poems in Occitan, sometimes accompanied by musical notations. These were composed in the 1100–1300's by some 350 troubadours whose names are known. The authors of these manuscripts often introduce the pieces with a biography (*vida*) of the songmakers or a brief explanation (*razo*) of their composition, which jongleurs would share with the audience before interpreting them. This constitutes the first large and homogeneous corpus in the Western world of songs in the vernacular language, the authors of which are almost always known by name. The low proportion of anonymous or pseudonymous authors in the corpus is a testimony to a new trend toward self-exaltation, with authors always speaking in the first person. This awareness of 'auctoriality' ('being an author') often crops up in the statements—which definitely sound pretentious or haughty to our modern ears—of the troubadours themselves. 'So gently can I adjust and link words and sounds that no man in the valued and rich art of the "trobar" is known to touch me' (III, l. 1–5), says Peire Vidal from Toulouse in the late twelfth century, in praise of the formal quality of his verses and of how perfectly they match the melody.

The main focus of the troubadours' lyrical art is love. They describe in minute detail—what is original in many respects—the lover's feelings, their many facets, and the different obstacles to be overcome in winning over the lady. Beside these love *cansos*, however, the troubadours would also write *sirventes*, with political, moral, or religious connotations. They would also indulge in *tensons*, *jocs partis*, or *partimens*, exchanging, very often off the cuff and as if in a competitive debate, whole poems or stanzas on a set topic. This poetic sociability is further evidence of the mode of interpretation of their works, always in public and often in the courts of princes or noblemen.

A study of the status of the hundred-odd troubadours for whom solid sociological data are available shows that half of them were indeed noblemen. The other half comprises mainly professional jongleurs, or clerks or bourgeois turned jongleurs. The forty-nine noblemen include twenty-

four castle owners, thirteen knights, and twelve ‘poor knights’,⁴¹ a distribution that underlines the division between high and low nobility and between lords and the armed horsemen in their service. As a category, the ‘poor knights’—almost all bachelors who did not own a tower house and offered their military know-how to whoever paid best—enjoy special prestige in the songs of the troubadours, who praise their youth, courage, and faithfulness, which are often associated with the poorest warriors in the feudal hierarchy. Occitan literature sometimes shows them in conflict with much more wealthy and mighty lords and castellans. According to his *vida* (XCIV), ‘knight’ Guilhem de Cabestany (d. c. 1215), ‘gentle and esteemed for his arms, service, and courtesy’, is murdered by the over-jealous Raimond de Château-Roussillon, a high lord who resents his courting his wife. Raimond tears out his heart, which he cooks and serves her for lunch. When he tells her what it is she has just eaten, she throws herself over the balcony. Even though the tale follows an ancient narrative pattern, it does highlight the tensions within the nobility at that time.

The brand of courtly love—in actual fact, troubadours refer much more often to *fin’amor* than to *cortez’amor*—invented and spread all over the Western world by the Occitan poets stands in sharp contrast with sentimental or erotic songs in traditional and popular poetry. It includes a number of specific features, such as much sacrifice to win the heart of the loved lady. It involves a long, melancholy wait through her hesitations and the ensuing anxiety, grief, and suffering. The pain and exertion of the conquest become, however, a source of personal achievement and inner improvement, thanks to ‘measure’, defined as that long patience that purifies desire. Paradoxically, there are other occasions when the lover does feel the *joy* (‘the joy of loving’) aroused by the presence or even the mere thought of the lady: a quasi-mystical ecstatic state. The vocabulary of *fin’amor* is often borrowed from feudo-vassalic relations, if only in its central use of notions such as ‘service’ and ‘fidelity’. The same goes for gestures: the lover kneels to pay homage to his lady, who in turn relinquishes tokens, as a liege lord would have granted a fiefdom by handing over some symbolic object. He now owes fidelity to his lady, despite the attacks of jealous third parties (*lauzangiers*), who will do their utmost to foil their mutual love.

Feudality always involves a hierarchy of lieges and vassals, ‘vavas-seurs’ (vassals’ vassals), and other lesser knights. That is why social ranking is an issue for troubadours. Guiraut de Bornelh asks King Alfonso II

⁴¹ Menegaldo, *Le Jongleur dans la littérature narrative*, 144–147.

of Aragon (1162–1196) whether or not his position at the top of the hierarchy excludes him from *fin'amor*. Will not he be loved for having rather than being? He asks of him in the course of a poetic debate (LVIII). Other troubadours raise similar issues, revealing a comparable sensitivity to feudal hierarchy and dominance relations. In a 1964 paper now considered seminal, and as brilliant for its logic and intuition as it was irritating for its systematicity in the eyes of some people, the medievalist Erich Köhler puts this issue at the very heart of the troubadour's lyrical art. In his analysis, the love service, the enjoying of the non-possession of the liege's wife, the praise of her generosity, the opposition of the snobbish hermetic and stilted style of *trobar clus* to the simplicity of *trobar leu* are all manifestations of 'the permanent tension between low nobility and high feudality'. Therefore, *fin'amor* might be reduced to an ideology that expresses the relations between the dominants and the dominated within the aristocracy. Courtly love would be 'in the final analysis, the sublimated projection of the material and social situation of the low nobility' (p. 28). Today, the most fashionable theories on courtly love build on this model, albeit without always acknowledging it. Indeed, they emphasize the relation between the lord (husband to the lady being praised) and the troubadour (a young unmarried warrior in his service), which they take to be much more crucial than the latter's feelings towards the lady, whose role is then reduced to that of mere passive crony of both her husband and her lover, or even a snare. What is elicited is the absolute submission of the vassal, even in his most intimate feelings, to his master. In the 'male-oriented' Middle Ages, the troubadours' love could thus only be a 'homo-social' affair, something that happens strictly between warriors.

The main fault of these social theories on the Occitan lyrical art, appealing as they may be, is that they minimise the poetic intention—which is quite overtly expressed by troubadours—of singing the praise of a lady who is omnipresent in their thoughts and almighty in her will.⁴² The poets are much more intent on devising discourses, verses, and melodies on love as a feeling, which, being in essence provocative, playfully breaks up society's standards and codes.⁴³ As a consequence, the woman sometimes appears non-existent or far too remote, like the countess of Tripoli in the Holy Land, whom Jaufre Rudel (c. 1130–c. 1170), prince of Blaye, loves from a distance, having never met her in person. Bernard de Ventadour (c. 1147–c. 1170), in a clear reference to the myth of Narcissus, confesses to

⁴² Aurell, '*Fin'amor*, *wadd* et féodalité', 79–83.

⁴³ Schnell, 'L'amour courtois'.

desiring his lady only for his own sake, to make her a mirror in which he contemplates his own reflection. It is indeed more his own passion than his loved one that the troubadour sings. In point of fact, he falls in love with himself, while the woman he claims to love is but pure voice, poetry, and song.⁴⁴ In the final analysis, contemporary scholars, because they are sensitive to a postmodern evolution in the social sciences, increasingly fall back on assumptions that are more focused on the troubadour's creative act and the resulting poetic text.

Nevertheless, understanding the deeper meaning of the themes conveyed by the love song by no means precludes approaching it from a sociological angle. Indeed, the society which fosters and spreads courtly love is feudal in the dual sense of being founded on vassallic relations and on an aristocratic domination of society. It is made up of lords and knights in their service, the two being interlinked by material and symbolic exchanges. Superiors rule subordinates who obey and who in compensation are granted a fiefdom, whether in the form of rent, a tower house, or land. These links are all the more tension-prone as they operate within a group of warriors whose overblown sense of honour made them particularly tetchy.

Even though love songs far outnumber all others in the Occitan corpus, troubadours also composed *sirventes*, which are mainly politically-oriented pieces. According to thirteenth-century poetic treatises, the word is etymologically linked both to the poets' counterfeiting and to their allegiance to a liege lord. On the one hand, their meter, rhyme, and melody are 'servilely' borrowed from a well-known love song, the *contrafactum* being all the more successful as it infuses an indisputable dose of humour into the original. On the other hand, the troubadour 'serves' a prince through his poem, since he extols his actions and attacks his enemies.⁴⁵ There also exist *sirventes* on moral and religious subjects. The political theme in such songs mirrors the personal involvement of the poets in the 'current affairs' of their times.

The biographies of some politically conscious troubadours are particularly familiar to us, first through their compositions, but also because of the charters and chronicles that often mention noblemen. A cross-study of these documents makes it possible to reconstruct their lives, which are often noteworthy for the intensity of their struggles. The most famous of the *sirventes* authors—whom Dante has wandering in Hell, carrying his

⁴⁴ Antonelli, 'Le je lyrique'.

⁴⁵ Aurell, *La Vielle et l'épée*, 12–13.

decapitated head as a lantern as punishment for his enthusiastic singing of violence and for fostering so many uprisings—is Bertran de Born (d. 1215), lord of Hautefort, on the Limousin-Périgord border. The miniatures of the manuscripts containing his songs present him as an aggressive warrior, posed ready to fight. Most of the forty-seven poems attributed to him include mentions of the battles he fought in his local area in the late twelfth century. Indeed, it seems he often composed them in order to encourage his side in their struggle against opponents. He was waging perpetual war, first against his brother Constantin, whom, around 1182, he drove out of the Hautefort family castle which he had shared with him until then. Constantin's next move in retaliation was to call on Aimar, viscount of Limoges, and on Richard the Lionheart (d. 1199), duke of Aquitaine, for help; the three of them fought the troubadour the following year, Bertran being supported by Richard's brother Henry the Young (d. 1183), who was unhappy with his inheritance. In order to put an end to the conflict, King Henry II then summoned his sons Richard and Henry to Caen for an assembly in which Bertran participated, the latter being then in contact with Geoffrey (d. 1186), duke of Brittany, another of the king of England's sons. Early in 1183, the troubadour took part in yet another war against Richard the Lionheart, alongside Henry the Young and Geoffrey of Brittany. Richard, with the help of his father and Alfonso II of Aragon, crushed his foes, in the process taking over Hautefort, which he handed back to Constantin. Bertran, who perhaps had meanwhile made peace with his brother, was to come into possession of the castle again later on. In 1185, strife broke out anew between Richard and his brothers Geoffrey and John over the dukedom of Aquitaine; but the troubadour seems to have stood aside this time. After the Christian defeat in Hattin (1187), however, his songs goaded the king of England, his sons, and the other princes and lords of the Western world into joining the Crusade. He praised Richard's bravery in the Holy Land—the two of them had by that time made a lasting peace—and rejoiced over his release from captivity by Emperor Henry VI (1190–1197). Yet in 1195, he was to give up society and strife and become a Cistercian monk in Dalon monastery next to his lands, where he died twenty years later.⁴⁶

In the next generation, *sirventes* flourished amongst the troubadours who fought in the Albigensian Crusade. One of these was a passionate player in the struggles that pitted Languedocians and Provençaux against Simon of Montfort's (d. 1218) men: Gui de Cavaillon (d. c. 1230), lord of

⁴⁶ Gouiran, 'Introduction' to his ed. of Bertran de Born, I-XXXVIII.

Comtat Venaissin and a fief of the count of Toulouse, to whom he had dedicated a lifetime of unflinching loyalty, and whom in his songs he urged to fight for his lost family estate, which had been confiscated by the crusaders. Later, he became ‘viguier’ or first officer to Raimond VI of Toulouse (1194–1222) for Comtat Venaissin, bringing military support at the siege of Beaucaire (1216) and the defence of the Castelnaudary stronghold (1220). Raimond’s successor Raimond VII (1222–1249) even made him ambassador to King Philip II Augustus in Paris in 1222. Up till then, the fate of arms had been favourable to the counts of Toulouse and their loyal councillor. But later, Louis VIII (1223–1226) was to subdue Languedoc for good, and in 1229 Gui agreed to serving as hostage to Blanche of Castile (d. 1252), the king’s widow, in warranty for the destruction of the walls of Toulouse. Back from captivity, he noted, in a sorrowful song, how much the family estate had shrunk since his youth. He then slipped into social limbo, and became, according to the—probably overblown—taunts of the troubadours who loathed him, ‘an old wreck’, living in ‘a derelict house’, who didn’t even possess a broken-down horse.

Gui de Cavaillon did not only write about the war that caused his ruin. He was brilliant at contentious verse trading, not only to deride the crusaders but also to debate love casuistry. His courtly *cansos* abide by the genre’s rules. One of them still strikes a quite original note, as it expresses the troubadour’s passion for love itself rather than the lady: ‘I love that desire, ardour, and yearning that proceed from you, my sweetest, as well as the worry, suffering, and long painful wait.’ Moreover, and more classically, he borrows imagery from vassalage even as he presents himself as his beloved’s ‘liegeman’: ‘I would as soon die, lady (*dompna*), if such is your desire, as find myself under the lordship (*senhoria*) of another love.’ Gui, a faithful follower of the count of Toulouse, and both a witness and a player of his time, who composed *sirventes* with one hand while fighting the French with the other, is also a master of the codes of *canso*. He is above all a specialist of verses to be exchanged with another troubadour, a form of dialogue that implies an obvious talent for improvising, but also for performing in front of a courtly audience.⁴⁷

Just like Gui de Cavaillon, Bertran de Lamanon (c. 1210–1270) composed *sirventes* and *tensons* rather than love songs, and their underlying ideology often stands in contrast with his own involvements. Indeed, he was a prominent member of the courts of Raimond Berenguer V (1209–

⁴⁷ Aurell, ‘Le troubadour Gui de Cavaillon’.

1245) and Charles I of Anjou (1246–1285), counts of Provence, who entrusted him with major military and administrative responsibilities. Besides, he and his parents took part in the strife between the house of Arles, or in the revolt of his city against the local archbishop's rule. Despite these family or communal wars, he worked towards restoring the counts' power in Provence and even in Italy, where he fought in Raimond Berenguer V's army beside Frederick II, and was to become Charles I's ambassador to the Piedmont cities. It was in 1266, in the immediate aftermath of the conquest of the kingdom of Sicily by the count of Provence, that he became the count's governor of the Principality of Naples, where he died. Bertran nevertheless maintained a critical stance towards Charles I's tax policy, and more precisely towards the *gabelle*, or tax on salt, which he condemned harshly in one of his songs. No doubt he was attached to the chivalric ideal of a warrior nobility, and rejected any form of princely interference with his estate, as is evidenced by his praise of Boniface de Castellane, who rose up against the count in 1262. His political discourse, as revealed in his songs, is diametrically opposed to his activity as a faithful servant of the count of Provence and promoter of new social structures aimed at controlling the nobility. Such contradictions may be indicative of a somewhat schizophrenic nostalgia for a feudal aristocracy totally unfettered by the state.⁴⁸

These three troubadours all knew how to use together the sword and the pen, but they had different attitudes towards the established powers. Bertran de Born shows alternately insubordination and obedience to the duke of Aquitaine as the internal strife develops within the Plantagenet house and his own. Gui de Cavaillon observes unflinching loyalty to the count of Toulouse. Lastly, Bertran de Lamanon, even if he criticizes the counts of Provence, nevertheless remains their faithful vassal. In short, these three troubadours seem to have been caught oscillating between the service to the prince and the defence of their own interests. And they put their poetic talent to good use in achieving their ends.

Noble troubadours, however busy they may have been with their involvement in warfare, still managed to acquire the technical know-how required for versification in a strict formal framework. While they might improvise topical songs without any written support, it was impossible to work in the same fashion when creating poems that were more complex in form or content. Moreover, they would sometimes slip Latin—albeit often tongue-in-cheek mock-Latin—words into their songs, thus demonstrating

⁴⁸ Aurell, 'Le troubadour Bertran de Lamanon'.

they were literate and had learned the rudiments of the classics in their youth. This bookish culture of theirs, albeit elementary, is evidenced in their references. Certain Bible passages are familiar to them, if only through the liturgy and preaching. References to the authors and writers of antiquity are scarcer. They can be found in, for example, the late twelfth-century *Ensenhamen* ('a pedagogically intended poem') by Arnaud de Mareuil, who quotes Homer, Plato, Virgil, and Porphyry (l. 6–8). However, it should be recalled that his *vida* claims he was but 'a poor clerk who could not live on his letters and had to take to the road, for he was very good at "trobar" and made a name for himself' (VII). If these details are true, this would explain the exceptional presence in the list of the neo-Platonician Porphyry. Most troubadours, especially the laymen among them, refer in their songs much more commonly to the great epic cycles of Charlemagne, Roland, or William of Orange, to Arthurian romances and to the ancient stories of Thebes, Troy, Alexander, or Aeneas, which were turned into romances in the course of the twelfth century.

Viscount Guerau de Cabrera's *Ensenhamen*, addressed to his jongleur, details a long list of troubadour songs, but mostly the thirty-odd epopees and narratives on the Knights of the Round Table and the heroes of old that any good singer must know. It also contains a scathing piece of criticism: 'Your viol-playing is bad, and your singing worse still' (l. 8–9). Guerau's advice is indeed that of an expert. In his *Recreation for an Emperor*, Gervase of Tilbury recounts how he had met him in Arles, in Alfonso II of Aragon's retinue, probably in 1194.⁴⁹ Guerau then appeared to him as 'a knight in his prime, merry and joyful, who has mastered several musical instruments, and was passionately desired by the ladies.' He describes a memorable night when Guerau played the viol as women sang along and his horse started dancing beautifully. Gervase, who was much taken by the wonderful, goes on to say that the 'magic' animal, named Bon-Ami, was so strong and swift that he was invincible in fighting, and that he communicated by sign language with his master, whom he would comfort in sorrow and most wisely counsel. Guerau would feed him with white wheat bread out of a silver vessel and have him sleep on a feather mattress. When the viscount died, Bel-Ami stopped eating and smashed his head against a wall (III, 92). This passage in the *Recreation* highlights the intensity of the link between knight and horse, which constitutes the essence of his military identity, and the better part of his social identity.

⁴⁹ Pirot, *Recherches sur les connaissances*, 177–186, 325–358.

What Gervase of Tilbury also shows is that the mastering of a musical instrument—including rubbed string instruments, which might have been thought to be reserved for jongleurs—is considered a first-rate asset within the aristocracy. This is borne out by Guillaume de Lorris who, in the *Romance of the Rose* (c. 1230), advises knights-to-be to learn ‘to play the viol and the flute’ (l. 2208–2209). In his *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury starts a long tirade about the decline of knighthood, which he described with a musical image: ‘Our youth are better acquainted with the cither, the lyre, the tambourine, and the melody of the organ at the banquets than with the clarion or trumpet in the camps’ (VI, 6). Indeed, the harp, or the lyre, played by king David himself or by romance heroes like Tristan or Apollonius of Tyre, enjoys superior status and prestige: ‘The nobler one was, the better one played the harp (l. 2825)’, said the Anglo-Norman clerk Thomas in his *Romance of Horn* in the late twelfth century. Nobility here is to be understood as a quality inherited by blood, and musical talent as one of the countless innate gifts thereby fostered.⁵⁰

In the educative passage quoted above, where the allegory of love prepares a boy to obey its commandments, the *Romance of the Rose* urges him to sing, ‘should he have a clear and healthy voice’, and to dance. That singing was enjoyed by knights and their entourage is evidenced by the very existence of the songs they composed. Another example will suffice to confirm this: in his *History of William the Marshal* (1224–1226), in Anglo-Norman verses, Jean le Trouvère recounts that, just before the beginning of a jousting tournament in Joigny, Île de France, in 1178 or 1179, the local countess, surrounded by her feminine court, asked, ‘Who is courteous enough to sing for us?’ Young William then started singing ‘in a soft, simple voice’, and everyone then started dancing (l. 3471–3480). A few hours later, William was to win the tournament in glory, thus proving if need be that fighting courage and warrior spirit were by no means incompatible with vocal performance. The anecdote also offers ample evidence of the routine practice of dancing along with music and singing.

Northern trouvères and Germanic Minnesänger

It was in the first third of the twelfth century that the themes and forms of the *fin’amor* lyrical art appeared in Occitany. As early as the 1170’s, they flourished in the north of France, where the first trouvères composed their songs. The court of Champagne was one of their most active centres.

⁵⁰ Menegaldo, ‘La place de la musique’, 163–164.

Chrétien de Troyes, a clerk and romance writer, and a familiar of the court, wrote two love poems, one of which is largely inspired by *Lauzeta*, the famous song by the troubadour Bernard de Ventadour (1147–1170). Chrétien worked under the patronage of Henry the Liberal of Champagne and of his wife Mary of France, just like his fellow knight trouvère Gace Brulé (c. 1159–c. 1213). In the next generation, Count Thibaud I of Champagne (1214–1253), king of Navarre from 1234 on, was a prolific writer who left us seventy-one amazing songs. Trouvère Conon de Béthune (d. 1219), a relative of the count of Flanders, was as active in literature as in crusading: he fought in the Holy Land in 1190 and at Constantinople in 1202, when he was elected Regent of the Latin Empire. In his book on the conquest of the city, Geoffroi de Villehardouin (c. 1150–1207), who had rubbed shoulders with him, calls him ‘intelligent and eloquent’, thus emphasizing his oratory talents (§213). His profile parallels that of Gui de Thourotte—who is also mentioned by Geoffroi de Villehardouin (§7, 114, 124)—castellan of Coucy and the author of some thirty poems, who also fought in the Holy Land around 1190 and died crusading in 1203.

Knights are well-represented among the two hundred-odd attested trouvères. Even so, their poetic activity seems to be less common in northern than in southern courts. In the north, as opposed to Occitany, it does not appear to have been an indispensable feature of social life for the aristocracy. Moreover, from the 1220’s onwards, courtly poetry spread out among the urban merchant bourgeoisie, who (e.g. in Arras) set up literary societies to organize poetic contests. The themes then began to lose some of their aristocratic elitism and to venture into the more comical, bawdy, and popular fields.⁵¹ Thus the tradition of women’s spinning or dancing songs was revived, in which the formal complexity and scholarly references of *fin’amor* poems were overshadowed.⁵²

Like the trouvères, the first German *Minnesänger* (‘love singers’) appeared in the late twelfth century. The category comprised both members of the high nobility and professional jongleurs. Even if the high aristocracy—including none other than Henry VI himself—featured prominently in it, the ministerials or *Dienstleuten* were also well represented. In the eleventh century, these second-class knights fighting for the troops of a lord would still sometimes suffer the humiliating throes of servitude, especially compulsory residence in their native estate and the paying of ser-

⁵¹ See recently Gingras, ‘D’autres genres de vilains’.

⁵² Zink, *Littérature française*, 121.

vile homages. However, in the aftermath of the Investiture Controversy, the active part they took therein paved the way to their eventual promotion, and their situation became quite comparable to that of the low and middle nobility in the rest of the Western world. The *Minnesänger* Frederick von Hausen (d. 1190) seems to have belonged to this social class, since as such he served the emperor Frederick Barbarossa. In Germany and elsewhere, creation and interpretation were viewed positively. At the beginning of *Poor Henry*, his romance in verse, Hartmann von Aue lists his hero's innumerable qualities, among which was that he 'was good at singing love' (l. 70–74).⁵³ All in all, on the eastern bank of the Rhine, as early as the end of the twelfth century, sophisticated courtly compositions in the vernacular were part and parcel of aristocratic distinction.

Songs were also part and parcel of aristocratic sociability. They were sung at princes' courts, but also in the more modest tower houses of the lower nobility. The fame of those talented knights who composed them spread out within and beyond their milieus, and all the more so if they were able to improvise before an audience of connoisseurs. Sometimes they would debate in verse with local poets, who took part with enthusiasm in these contests of wits. They were also able to sing and to accompany themselves on an instrument. People would dance to their melodies: ladies, too, would take part in these festivities, where the amorous theme was predominant in the compositions. However, political issues did not take second place for those authors, and their songs would sometimes defend the interests of the local lord. Their calamus-wielding skills matching their sword-wielding, it was propaganda that they spread.

Romances, sagas, and other fictional genres: a rare form of writing

The romance is defined as any long fictional narrative in the vernacular ('romance') language. It was originally rhymed, but from the 1210's onwards, prose became predominant. The earliest surviving examples are in octosyllabic verses in French, dating back to the second half of the twelfth century, to wit: the 1155 *Roman de Brut*, a free translation (or 'romancing') by Wace of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*; the anonymous *Romance of Thebes*, a contemporary adaptation of the *Thebaid* of Statius (c. 45–96 AD); Benoît de Sainte-Maure's *Romance of Troy* (1165), from a fifth century Latin version of *The Destruction of Troy*

⁵³ Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 495–499.

attributed to one Dares Phrygius; and the *Tale of Floire and Blanchefleur*, again from the 1150s or 1160's, a reworking of an Oriental story about the love of two youths. It was in the 1170s–90s that Chrétien de Troyes wrote his Arthurian romances. Wace, Benoît, and Chretien were all clerks, which status they sometimes invoke in their works to justify their faithfulness to a Latin original they claim to be strictly abiding by. In their eyes, following the ancient model makes their books authentic and truthful.

The Grail adventures in French

Only a few knights wrote French language romances in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Such was probably the case of Robert de Boron, who claimed to be the author of the poem *Joseph of Arimathea*, also known under its medieval title, *Romance of the History of the Holy Grail*. He may have given it a sequel in his *Merlin* and then in his *Perceval*, of which all that remains today is a complete prose version. *Joseph* is a brief (3154 verses) account of how Joseph of Arimathea, a knight in Pilate's service and a disciple of Jesus, received the Holy Grail, how his lineage establishes itself as guardians of the Grail, and how they bring it back to the West. In the only extant manuscript of the romance, Robert calls himself 'master' (*meistre*, l. 3155, i.e. 'graduate') as well as *messire* (l. 3461, 'lay lord', 'dubbed nobleman'). The latter is probably more fitting to his status, because those prose writers and translators who adapted his work later on preserved it, never mentioning the former. Even though no document mentions Robert de Boron, his protector Gautier de Montbéliard (d. 1212), whom he cites in the epilogue to *Joseph*, is well-documented. He was lord of Montfaucon, in Franche-Comté, took the crusading oath in 1199, and travelled to the Holy Land in 1202, where he married the daughter of the king of Jerusalem and Cyprus, becoming the Regent and the Constable of the kingdom. There is indeed a village called Boron some ten miles from Montbéliard, and it is impossible to know for sure whether it was in Franche-Comté that Robert wrote his *Joseph*, before his lord departed for the Middle East in 1201, or at the court of Cyprus c. 1205–1210.

Robert de Boron's aim is to teach doctrinal and moral lessons to his audience. The marked Christian flavour of his narrative is obvious in particular in his description of the holy vessel as a Christic relic, quite unlike Chrétien de Troyes' Grail, which preserves elements of pagan Celtic mythology. Spirituality also looms in the themes of redeeming, conversion, penance, or confession that pervade *Joseph of Arimathea*, which draws on

the Gospel of the Passion, but also on *Exodus* and *Numbers*. Robert is familiar with the Bible, of course, but also with the Apocrypha, which, along with the *Acts of Pilate* (fourth century), the *Healing of Tiberius* (sixth-seventh centuries), and *Revenge of the Saviour* (c. 700), allowed him to supplement his romance with episodes on the jailing of Joseph, his visitors, his testimony before the Jews, the emperor's leprosy, his sudden healing at the sight of Veronica's veil, his conversion, and his decision to destroy Jerusalem. He was able to read translations of the Apocrypha, rather than the Latin originals, French versions being widely available in the twelfth century. In the only manuscript containing *Joseph*, it is followed by the first 504 octosyllabic verses of *Merlin*, the end of which is missing. These verses, which may well also be by Robert, describe the council held in Hell by the demons to foil the effects of the Redemption and their subsequent decision to foster a false prophet in the person of the daughter of one of their female zealots. Interest in religious issues is again apparent in the narrative. Robert's romances, while entertaining his readers or hearers, at the same time convey a basic catechetical teaching.⁵⁴

The religious overtones of Robert de Boron's poems stand in sharp contrast with the subject matter of the *Bel Inconnu* ('The Fair Unknown'), a 6,266 octosyllable narrative of the liberating of Blonde Esmeree from an enchantment that transformed her into a 'guivre', a fantastic serpent. The young anonymous hero, with permission from King Arthur, succeeds in withstanding her 'proud kiss', thus giving her back her beautiful human form. The author is Renaud de Bâgé (c. 1165–1230), lord of Saint-Trivier near Mâcon, an imperial land, whose family supported the king of France in the strife between the local houses. The *Bel Inconnu* indeed bears the Bâgé family's lion coat of arms, the heraldic animal representing the emperor's foes. In making his hero the son of Gawain and a fairy, Renaud confers prestigious mythical origins on his own house. He is the bachelor second son of his generation, a status sometimes associated by medievalists with the genesis of courtly love. The tale is originally Celtic, but also draws on Chrétien de Troyes's *Erec and Enide*, a poet whom Renaud may well have met, along with Jean Renart, another romance writer, who mentions him in his own *William of Dole*.⁵⁵

Philippe de Remy (c. 1205–c. 1265), lord of Beaumanoir in Beauvaisis, was at one time provost of Compiègne, then bailiff of Gâtinais on behalf of Louis IX and his brother Robert of Artois (d. 1250). Philippe, a

⁵⁴ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 399–404.

⁵⁵ Guerreau, 'Renaud de Bâgé: *Le Bel inconnu*', 30–36.

royal officer, left an important body of works, including several courtly songs and two romances in verse, *Manekine* and *Jehan and Blonde*, written in the 1230s–1240s. These books relate the stories of youthful love thwarted by forced marriages but with happy outcomes that preserve the sanctity of marriage. The writer's spirituality is obvious in his *Hail Mary*, composed in verses of twelve syllables. His son and namesake Philippe de Beaumanoir (c.1252–1296) had a similar administrative career as a provost and bailiff in Beauvaisis before being dubbed and becoming seneschal of Poitou and Saintonge. His legal experience caused him to compile his *Customs of Beauvaisis*.⁵⁶ These knights, being educated king's officers, are versed in literature as well as in pragmatic and legal writing. They pass their book culture on to the next generation, as is common in so many noble families in the Middle Ages.

Unlike these authors, those presenting themselves as knights in the prose *Tristan* (1225–1240) never actually existed: their names are given as Luce del Gat and Hélié de Boron, anachronistically mentioned in the prologues or epilogues of the various manuscripts alongside Walter Map, the supposed source of the stories, and Henry II of England, the supposed generous patron. Both Walter and Henry II had been long dead at the time when *Tristan* was rewritten in prose, which robs the two knights of any claims to authenticity. The former introduces himself in the prologue as 'I, Luce, knight, lord and keeper of Gat castle near Salisbury, an amorous and merry knight' (t. 1, p. 39). Hélié de Boron appears in the epilogue preserved in twelve of the manuscripts of *Tristan*, where he claims to have taken five years off 'knighthood and any other pleasure' to do nothing else but write. He also proclaims himself Commander of the Latin Empire of Constantinople, descendent of Robert de Boron and kin to Guillaume de Barres (d. 1234), a knight from Île-de-France famous for his military feats in the service of King Philip II Augustus. Such a succession of anachronisms is further evidence that these would-be authors were created out of thin air by such false attribution, a very common *modus operandi* in the Middle Ages.

The pseudo-writers Luce du Gat and Hélié de Boron overtly flaunt the profanity—as opposed to religiosity—of their works. In so doing, they shed light on how knights came to embody love, pleasure, and merriness, when clerics remained associated with the stern, boring side of religion.⁵⁷ According to them, their narrative of the adulterous transgressions of Tris-

⁵⁶ Tyl-Labory, 'Philippe de Beaumanoir'.

⁵⁷ Baumgartner, 'Luce del Gat et Hélié de Boron'.

tan—with whom Luce the ‘lover’ overtly identifies—has a purely ‘divertive’ purpose (in the etymological, Pascalian sense of ‘that which diverts from God’, *a Deo vertere*). Reality, however, is less bipolar than their prologues or epilogues would have us believe. Indeed, some passages in the prose *Tristan*, with their strong religious connotations, run counter to this Manichean vision of the distinct, opposed, and mutually exclusive roles of knighthood and clergy.⁵⁸ And the same goes for Robert de Boron, who was most probably a knight, and who makes lavish and uncompromising reference in his writings to the themes of sin, penance, and redemption.

The German ministerials

In the late twelfth century, Wolfram von Eschenbach started his poetic career composing courtly songs in the *Minnesänger* fashion. Seven—maybe nine—of them have survived. But he is best known for his *Parzival*, which he wrote after 1204, an extended, religious, and sometimes esoteric adaptation in 24,810 verses of Chrétien de Troyes’ *Story of the Grail*. He also wrote *Willehalm* (1210–1220), an epic poem drawing on the French cycle of William of Orange, the indefatigable Saracen fighter. After 1217, he composed the *Titirel* episode, apparently a subplot of *Parzival*, only fragments of which are extant. Eschenbach is a market town in Mid-Franconia, about twenty miles from Nuremberg.

On three separate occasions, Wolfram von Eschenbach extols Hermann I (1190–1217), landgrave of Thuringia and count palatine of Saxony. In *Parzival* (§297), he has him besieging a city, most probably Erfurt, where Hermann fought Emperor Philip of Swabia (1198–1208) in 1203; he also praises his generosity, which he even finds excessive and indiscriminate. *Willehalm*’s prologue compares him to William of Orange, whose feats Wolfram sets out to recount, and portrays him as ready to help any knight in trouble (§3, l. 8–15). Last, *Titirel* calls up the memory of Herman I, ‘man of honour, whose fame is still alive among his peers’ (§87/82a). In short, Wolfram is described as a close associate of Hermann I, whose patronage he enjoyed and whom he may have served in his troop. He also rubbed shoulders with the count of Wertheim, who had some possessions in Eschenbach, and whom he calls ‘my lord’ as he depicts in *Parzival* the starving population of the besieged Pelrapeire castle and carps at the count who he mocks can no longer feast. He then goes on to

⁵⁸ Girbea, *La Couronne ou l’auréole*, 525–528.

say that he himself never eats his fill, since, even though he is called 'lord', whenever he dismounts, he lives in deprivation, and 'not even a mouse would find a morsel to fare on' in his house. Wolfram thus wittily and vividly sets the figure of the poor knight-poet in opposition to his wealthy lieges.

In view of those close links Wolfram von Eschenbach entertains with the counts of Thuringia and Wertheim, he must himself have belonged to a milieu of lesser knights from some princely court, where his works would have been interpreted. Maybe he was a warrior in their army, for Wolfram describes weaponry, horses, and fights with professional accuracy. He doesn't seem to have been admitted to any of the major orders, since he has a daughter, whose doll, he says in *Willehalm* (§33, l. 18–26), cannot possibly be as glittering as the coats of mail of the heathen army he is describing.⁵⁹ Lastly, it is as a knight that he explicitly introduces himself in *Parzival*: 'Wearing an escutcheon, such is my natural condition!' In this particular passage, after foregoing the praise of a lady who had angered him, he claims himself to be ready to love and serve others, provided they yield to him not for his poetic talent but for his military feats: 'Let her not love me for my singing, if I don't prove valiant, and let me win the prize of her love with escutcheon and spear!' Wolfram then poses as an illiterate who does not even know his alphabet and recounts his story without any help from books (§114–116). He even claims to have heard the Grail story from the mouth of Kyot the Provençal, rather than saying that Kyot handed a manuscript over to him. Indeed, Wolfram presents Kyot as the translator into French of the 'genuine tale' kept in Saragossa, which is supposed to give *Parzival* an edge over Chrétien de Troyes' *Story of the Grail* (§416, 453–455, 827). In *Willehalm* he brings up the theme again, claiming he 'knows nothing about the contents of books' (§2, l. 19–22). In the years 1305–1340, the miniaturist of the *Manesse Codex* (named after the wealthy Zurich family which commissioned this manuscript of *Minnesänger* songs) painted him with his weapons, standing beside his horse, whose bridle is held by a squire.

Wolfram's presentation of himself as a hardly literate warrior, mock-humble and complacent as it is, is just another instance of authorial posing and of the literary *topos* of modesty. It is carried over in his constant references to what he heard people read out or recount, and to the oral transmission of his work.⁶⁰ The crude knight thus raises himself to clerk-

⁵⁹ Pérennec, *Wolfram von Eschenbach*, 5–18.

⁶⁰ Berthelot, *Figures et fonction de l'écrivain*, 105.

competitor status, all the more so when ladies' hearts are at stake. The same polemic attitude towards scholars makes him exaggerate his lack of education, even as elsewhere he flaunts, albeit indirectly, his book learning through medical, astronomical, or geological references. By the same token, if Wolfram affects to depreciate scholar and bookish culture, that is to stress on the oral reciting of his work at court, whose written support would thus appear less important. He denies his poem book status,⁶¹ purporting to voice it before a connoisseur audience, who will shout approval. Nevertheless, he betrays himself in one verse that expresses his wish that many a damsel should 'see his narrative laid down in writing' (§337, l. 3). This slip of the 'tongue', if any, looks revealing. That Wolfram was able to compose *Parzival*, with so consistent a narrative fabric despite its length, and so formally polished, surely implies his recourse to reading and writing. It is simply impossible that he could have dictated it from memory. His illiteracy is indeed but a pose.

On the face of it, Hartmann von Aue (c. 1160–c. 1220) has a very different attitude to writing than his contemporary Wolfram von Eschenbach, as he overtly boasts of his high literary culture. A native Swabian, he is the author of the *Lament* (c. 1180), a 1,914-verse debate on love between the knight's heart and body; of eighteen lyrical songs; of *Erec* (c. 1180) and *Iwein* (c. 1200), both drawing on the famous Chrétien de Troyes romances; and of *Gregorius* (c. 1190), a reworking of the ancient story of a knight born of incest and unknowingly incestuous himself, who becomes a penitent and eventually ascends all the way to the papacy. Around 1195, his *Poor Henry* is the 1,500-verse story of Heinrich von Ouwe, a knight at the top of his fame who contracts leprosy, which, he is told, only the blood sacrifice of a young maiden will cure. He moves in with a peasant family, and it so turns out that the daughter offers him her life, which elicits his and the maiden's parents' expected refusal. The narrative then proceeds to a happy fairy-tale ending. In his prologue, Hartmann introduces himself in the following way: 'Once upon a time, there was a knight (*Ritter*) who was so well-educated that he could read whatever is found in books. His name was Hartmann and he was a ministerial (*Dienestman*) in the service of the house of Aue. He set out to search all sorts of books thoroughly, tormenting himself while labouring for hours in order to find stories that would befit God's glory and win the people's esteem. He might have spent all this time in a more pleasant way' (l. 1–15). This is another case of a knight contrasting the pain of writing with the pleasure

⁶¹ Zumthor, *La Lettre et la voix*, 308.

that would likely be derived from courtly life or even from war. As for Wolfram von Eschenbach, the miniaturist of the *Codex Manesse* represents him a warrior. He portrays him on horseback, protected by the hauberk and shield, covered with a crest and a coat, holding a spear with a pennant. His heraldic symbol is the bird (*avis* in Latin).

That Hartmann mastered Latin is apparent in his own admission to having read numerous books at a time when German translations were scarce, but also in the recurring allusions to the classics and to theologians to be found in all his works. He must also have been familiar with French, as he drew on Chrétien de Troyes, whom he overtly quotes in two of his romances. He may have used a French-language version of the *Life of Pope Gregorius*. In short, this member of the lower nobility, whose main occupation was war, must have had an excellent education in youth, most probably in a monastery, if we take *Gregorius'* hero's stay in a convent as a child to be autobiographic. Indeed, in the romance, the monks teach him grammar, theology, and law (l. 1155–1200).

The author of *Wigalois* (1204–1216), an 11,708 verse epic in German, has traditionally been considered by scholars to be a knight; the eponymous hero, supposedly the son of Gawain and a fairy, is a wandering knight who eventually becomes king. Its author is Wirnt von Grafenberg and his status as a knight was first mentioned by the poet Konrad von Würzburg in the 1260's. *Wigalois*, moreover, contains bitter criticism against those parvenus who get themselves dubbed even though they are not descended from noble lineage, and strip their defeated enemies of arms and armour in blatant violation of the basic code of chivalry (l. 2319–2348). The staple cliché of 'the good old times of yesteryear' (*laudatio temporis acti*) would seem to accord with the nostalgia of a nobleman of ancient stock who resents the rise of the ministerials. Yet Wirnt, even as he is cognizant of the German literature of his generation, has almost a clerk's culture, with his grasp of the Bible, Ovid and the lapidaries along with other Latin treatises on natural history.⁶²

Rudolf von Ems (d. c. 1254) mentions the *Wigalois*, along with the *Tristan* of Gottfried von Strassburg, a man he deeply admires, but also other German contemporary literary works and Latin books. Born at Hohenems castle south of Bregenz, Austria, he refers to himself as *Knappe* and *Dienstman*, i.e. as a ministerial, in the service of the counts of Montfort (Vorarlberg) in his *Willehalm von Orlens* (1238), the chronicle

⁶² Honnemann, 'The Wigalois', 142; Lecouteux and Lévy, 'Notice' to their trans. *Wigalois*, 492.

of young William of Orleans's royal education and stories of his amours (l. 15627). He claims to have translated the work from a book John of Ravensburg brought back for him from France. He also says he is working in honour of Conrad of Winterstetten (l. 15662–15666), a ministerial from the imperial Hohenstaufen dynasty and preceptor to Conrad IV (1237–1254), son of Frederick II. It was at the bidding of the latter that Rudolph started, from 1240 onwards, a universal verse chronicle in middle high German, which is in actual fact an encomium for the Hohenstaufen, whom he goes so far as saying are to be sanctified. He may have died in the Italian campaign of 1254 in which Conrad IV lost his life. He is also the author of *Good Gerhard*, whose eponymous hero is a paragon of resignation and humility who sees his son become ministerial to the archbishop of Cologne and eventually dubbed. *Barlaam and Josaphat* (1225–1230) is a reworking of the legend of these two figures, the latter a young Indian prince turned hermit who becomes a Christian thanks to the former; the work was sponsored by the abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Kappel near Zurich, who allegedly provided him with the Latin original of a work wrongly attributed to John of Damascus which he claims to draw upon. Of his *Romance of Alexander* (c. 1240), on the Macedonian hero's youth, we have no less than 21,000 verses preserved, and this is only a fragment.⁶³ All in all, the sheer number of his writings as well as their length make him one of the most prolific writers of the genre.

Together with Wolfram von Eschenbach, Hartmann von Aue, and Wirnt von Grafenberg, Rudolf von Ems is testimony to the vitality of the tradition among the Empire's lay aristocracy between 1180 and 1250 of composing long texts. German romances in verse were often written by clerks, but also by knights who flaunt their social rank and the quality of their princely patrons. With the possible exception of Wirnt, the above-mentioned authors belong to the ministerial class, just as a number of troubadours have their origins in the lower Occitan nobility. Theirs was a courtly milieu where their works, written in verse, met an enthusiastic audience. Their creative activity seems indeed to have resonated positively, as is apparent in the case of the main protagonist of Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan*, who is described as a highly talented poet and musician whom each noble would love to imitate (l. 3626–3629).

⁶³ Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 90, 245, 470–474, 494, 510; Gibbs and Johnson, *Medieval German Literature*, 333–343.

Italy, compilers and encyclopaedists

In Italy, Rusticello da Pisa may have been a knight. In his *Book of Wonders*, Marco Polo (1254–1324), the famous Italian traveller, recounts how he had met him in a Genoese prison back in 1298 and dictated the story of his travels for him to write down in French, the preferred language of Italy's urban elites. Perhaps this is a yarn spun in *Book of Wonders* prologue only meant to appeal to the reader. If not, Rusticello might well have been among the Pisan prisoners from the naval battles of la Meloria (1284) or la Curzola (1298). Between 1272 and 1298, he compiled several long French romances in prose, *Guiron le Courtois*, *Lancelot-Graal*, *Roman de Tristan*, and *Palamède*, which he gathered under the title *Roman du roi Arthur*. While in Genoa, he may have rubbed shoulders with Taddeo of Pisa who copied in the same manuscript a translation into Tuscan of *Saint Jerome's Degrees*, a Latin philosophical treatise on similitude, and a French treatise on penance and sermons by Maurice de Sully (1160–1196), bishop of Paris. Taddeo prepared this manuscript during the year 1288 he spent in prison in Genoa.⁶⁴

Two other Tuscan laymen of the same generation have left a considerable body of work. The first of these is the Milanese Pietro of Bescapé, who in 1274 composed a *Sermon* relating the Sacred Story, from Creation to Doomsday, in 2,440 Italian verses. There is special emphasis on Christ's life and passion, and bitter complaints about his own times' corruption, greed, and depravity. In the colophon, he introduces himself as a *fantón*, 'warrior' (l. 2431). Some historians identify him as one of the military commanders of the city; if this is correct, his contemporary Brunetto Latini (c. 1220–1294) may have met him. The latter appears in the records of 1254 as notary to the commune of Florence. In 1260, he travelled as its ambassador to the court of King Alfonso X of Castile but found himself unable to return, Florence having been taken over by the Ghibellines after the battle of Montaperti. He then sought refuge in Paris, Arras, and Bar-sur-Aube, writing the *Book of the Treasure*, an encyclopaedia composed in French, which was extraordinarily popular in medieval Europe. Indeed, seventy manuscripts are recorded for the original version and several of translations (Latin, Italian, Catalan, Castilian). The book made available to literate laymen a compendium of classical learning, in the fields of theology, history, natural science, rhetoric, and politics. The victory of Charles of Anjou, the leader of the Guelph party, in

⁶⁴ Baldelli, 'La letteratura volgare in Toscana', 73.

Benevent in 1266 opened the doors of Florence again to Brunetto, and he appears as a pronotary and chancellor in the city records thereafter. Even though he undeniably played a prominent political role, we have no evidence that this most prolific author ever was a military man.⁶⁵

In *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), a fellow Florentine, claims Brunetto to be his former teacher, and has him in Hell in the midst of ‘clerks and great scholars’ who allegedly succumbed like him to sodomy (XV, l. 25–124). Might it be that Dante bore him some grudge for writing his *Book of the Treasure* in French and not in Italian, which is for Dante the worst of the sins against nature? Or perhaps he criticizes ‘this worldly man’ for flaunting religious impiety? A diehard Guelph, Dante took part in Florence’s military campaigns in northern Italy against the Ghibellines, fighting at the battle of Campaldino (1289) and at the siege of Caprona (1290). A prior or member of the Florentine government, his public opposition to Pope Boniface VIII caused him to be exiled in 1302. He died in Ravenna in 1321.⁶⁶

Dante wrote most of his works in Italian, and he even developed theoretical arguments for the superiority of the vernacular languages over Latin. In *The Banquet*, he claims that what he wants to philosophize on the basis of Aristotelian ethics, to seek comfort after the death of his beloved Beatrice, and to reach ‘human perfection’ through reason (III, 15, 4). He aims his thoughts at laymen, who will all the better understand them as he has abandoned Latin (I, 7, 12). Lastly, he protests the theocratic intrusion of the papacy and the clergy in temporal affairs, which should solely be reserved for laymen. At the turn of the fourteenth century, and in the name of natural order, this secular vision sets a dividing line between the spiritual and the government of the city. What it puts forward is a philosophical, reason-based way of thinking that is independent of revelation.⁶⁷ The poet, however, did undertake to write a body of essentially Christian works, where poetic imagination is instrumental in the interpretation of the dogma. No doubt Dante Alighieri’s has a very modern mentality, which stems perhaps from his active participation in Florence’s political and military life.

⁶⁵ Carmody and Fery-Hue, ‘Brunetto Latini’.

⁶⁶ Risset, *Dante, une vie*, 89–95, 111–132, 210–211.

⁶⁷ Livi, *Dante e la teologia*.

Snorri Sturluson's sagas

Since at least early Middle Ages, there had been, in the Scandinavian countries, a group of skalds, or professional poets, attached to a nobleman's retinue. Their songs perpetuated the traditions of pagan mythology or local history. The best-known writer of these 'sagas', which are prose accounts of a god's, hero's, or warrior's biography, was a layman who took an active part in war and politics. Snorri Sturluson, born in 1179, belonged to an influential family in then independent Iceland. From 1215 on, he established himself as a 'speaker of the law', as such chairing the *Althing*, the island's supreme assembly on which family chiefs sat. As a child, he had been raised by Jón Loftsson, a learned man who was a familiar of the royal house of Norway, and in 1218 he sailed to the court of the young Haakon IV (1217–1263) and prince Skuli, his tutor. His mastery of skaldic poetry was one of the main reasons for the invitation. He then composed songs in honour of the king, to whom he had pledged an oath of allegiance. However, his love of his fellow countrymen put him in a difficult situation when the young prince started planning a punitive expedition against Iceland, which was hostile to Bergen's merchants.

Shortly before the year 1222, Snorri went back to Iceland, where he started a second term as 'speaker of the law' which lasted for about ten years. During this time, he was at odds with his brother and raised an army against him. In 1237, he returned to Norway, where a war pitted Haakon IV against his former tutor Skuli, with whom Snorri stayed. Two years later, he was back in Iceland without permission from the king, who bore him a grudge for being friends with Skuli and would have preferred to keep him by his side, wary as he was of Snorri's commitment to his native island's independence. After putting Skuli to death, the king decided to punish Snorri. He ordered him assassinated by Icelandic supporters of union with Norway, who killed him in his home in 1241. Eventually, the murderers won out, for the *Althing* ratified the union in 1262.

It was in the city of Oddi, the cultural centre of southern Iceland, that Jón Loftsson gave Snorri his education; the saga tradition was especially alive there in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Snorri, who absorbed that lore in its entirety, is the author of at least two long texts in Old Norse: first, the *Edda*, or *Art of Poetry* (c. 1220), a skaldic poetry treatise with long narratives of Scandinavian mythology; second, the *Chronicle of the Kings of Norway* or *Heimskringla* (c. 1225), which tells the saga of sixteen of these princes, mainly in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The

latter work takes up oral traditions, but is also based on a critical reading of chronicles and lives of saints from the Nordic countries, some of which had been written in Latin.⁶⁸

Impiety or religiosity?

The knightly writers contribute to the rise of the romance, a profane literary genre of fiction and imagination. Its themes are deemed 'vain and pleasant' by Jean Bodel (c. 1165–1210) in his *Song of the Saxons* (l. 9). Jean, a trouvère from Arras, applies this description, which associates pleasure and triviality, to the matter of Breton—the whole corpus of Arthurian romances pervaded by pure fairy-tale fiction and wonders running counter to the laws of nature—which he contrasts both with the humourless historical bent of French epic and the transmission of ancient lore in Greek and Roman mythology. More austere yet are those over-rigorous priests who revile the brand of entertainment readers or hearers may derive from the *Edda*, which records the feats of Scandinavian paganism's gods and heroes, and from Celtic-style romances like *Erec*, *Iwein*, or *Wigalois*. They reject fiction as 'lie', like in the prologue of an anonymous French *Life of the Desert Fathers* (c. 1200), which sharply criticizes the 'romances of vanity which kill and maim the soul'.⁶⁹ In his *Life of Saint Edmund* (1170–1200), the Anglo-Norman cleric Denis Piramus, a repentant former court poet, also finds fault with the deceit of romance, whose 'stuff, made of fable and lie, looks like a dream, for what it relates cannot ever have happened' (l. 29–31). For both hagiographers, fiction is but illusion that offers no benefit to man. Inasmuch as it professes evasion from terrestrial and supernatural realities, it drives him away from salvation.

The exemplary, edifying truth conveyed by the life of saints or by history is, it seems, incompatible with the wonder, entertainment, and amorality of romance. The critique is most ancient, going back at least to Plato, the highest reference of twelfth-century thinkers, who railed at the lies of poets while extolling the more genuine creative activity of philosophers. It fits in with Augustine of Hippo's scorn for actors, also manifested by John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus* (1159), when he protests at the lamentable performances of entertainers: 'Our foolish times are keen

⁶⁸ Dillmann, 'Introduction' to Snorri Sturluson, *LEdda*, 10–14.

⁶⁹ Quoted in P. Meyer, 'Traduction en prose, faite pour Blanche, comtesse de Champagne', *Histoire littéraire de la France*, Paris, 1906, t. 33, 293, l. 23–36.

on fables, which through their vanity prostitute ears and heart' (I, 8). The romance's immorality was also discussed, albeit more subtly, in 1215 or 1216 in *The Italian Visitor* of Thomasin von Zerklare, a cleric from the curia of German patriarch of Aquileia: 'He who yearns for in-depth learning, let him not waste his time with romances, let him rather follow the philosophical precepts of propriety, intelligence, and truth. I could not, however, condemn romances altogether, even though they lie to us, for there is some truth in them' (l. 1113–1126).

A more radical judgment is to be found in the prologue to the treatise against Islam which Pedro Pascual (c. 1227–1300), bishop of Jaén (Andalusia), compiled while a prisoner in the kingdom of Granada, where he was eventually to be beheaded. He criticizes most of all the romances of Middle Eastern inspiration: 'Be sure that it is better to spend time reading and listening to this book than to tell little tales, love romances, and other vanities, which sometimes do contain good examples, but mostly a lot of bad artifice and deceit for body and soul.'⁷⁰ Also at the same time and in the Iberian world, Raymond Lull's *Doctrina pueril* maintains an extreme position: 'To accustom a child to listen to futilities, frivolous words, romances, songs, and musical instruments, which cause lust, is to inoculate into his memory, his intelligence, and his will a poison and a toxic, which waste and spoil his gifts, burning his soul in a perdurable fire' (XCI, 5). These examples are evidence that profane romances are often associated with error and immorality.

Romance fiction, however reviled it may have been by the most rigorist of clerics, does not inevitably result in perdition. Most churchmen had an indifferent, or even positive attitude towards it, as long as it abided by a few moral rules. There are representations of scenes from the life of Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table in the cathedrals of Santiago de Compostella, of Modena in Emilia, and of Otranto in Apulia. Preachers sometimes used anecdotes from these romances to catch their audience's attention and draw moral lessons. Admittedly, they would also deplore the compassion elicited by the Arthurian heroes' misfortunes as compared to the general indifference to the sufferings of Christ on the Cross.⁷¹ The insertion of King Arthur both in church iconography and preaching from the pulpit does show, however, that profane fiction and sacred truth should not be regarded as too radically severed from each other in medie-

⁷⁰ Quoted in G. Argote de Molina, *Nobleza de Andaluzia*, Séville, 1588, 180. See Bäuml, 'Varieties and Consequences', 255–256.

⁷¹ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 220–240.

val mentalities, which can hardly be analysed as distinct and watertight compartments. By the same token, it would be improper to set in opposition the production of knightly romance writers to that of the clerics. The religious intent in Robert de Boron's works, which largely draw on the Gospels and the Apocrypha, is quite obvious. Hartmann von Aue set out in German verse the exemplary life of Pope Gregorius, while another edifying story is that of Barlaam and Josaphat, a favourite of Rudolf von Ems'; not to mention the *Divine Comedy*, a poetic monument to Christian eschatological doctrine. Lay romance authors could in any case only conceive of their literary activities within the Church, even in their most profane and entertaining aspects.

History and memory: telling the Crusade

As early as the late eleventh century, the Crusades caused knights to roam the roads and seas of the Near East, and disrupted their perception of the world. It set them on a voyage that was not only military, collective, and eschatological in nature but also of an inner kind. The discovery of the Mediterranean and Islamic civilizations broadened the noblemen's mental horizons, which henceforth were open to realities sharply distinct from their familiar environment. The war in the Holy Land brought them adventures that they were keen to relate as soon as they returned. It also had a deep influence on the writing of epic and romance. The cycles of Roland or William of Orange offer caricatures of the Saracen as a foe at once dangerous and devilish. The Arthurian romances turn the quest for the Grail into a story of a Eucharistic relic to be snatched from the hands of infidels and renegades in a space that is very reminiscent of the Holy Land. The Crusades, however, did not simply foster heavy-handed anti-Muslim propaganda. It also—if we follow the medievalist Michel Zink—contributed, on a more positive note, to the rise of thirteenth-century 'literary subjectivity', the hotbed of 'monodic writing' (that is, one-voice autobiographic narratives).⁷² It thus appears that the definite novelty represented by the knights' prose memoirs in the vernacular owes much to their stays overseas.

⁷² *La Subjectivité littéraire*, 191–194. Guibert of Nogent's *Autobiographie* is also known as *Monodie*, which means a melody sung by a single voice.

Overseas adventure in oc and oil

The earliest testimony representing a layman's account of the Crusades is to be found in the *Chronicle* by Geoffrey of Vigeois, a monk from Limousin: 'Grégoire, whose family name was Bechada, born in the village of Lastours, a knight with a subtle mind and a limited grasp of Latin, wrote a long and suitable book on the high feats of these wars, in vernacular and ordinary verse so he could be easily understood by the people' (§30). The chronicler goes on to say that, to ensure the truthfulness and beauty of his work, Grégoire took all of twelve years to complete it. He also counted on the moral and literary endorsement of Bishop Eustorge of Limoges (1106–1137) and of Gaubert the Norman, a character otherwise unknown outside Geoffroi's book. Lastly, the chronicle claims that Grégoire's lord was none other than Gouffier de Lastours, one of the heroes of the siege of Ma'arrat-an-Nu'man (1098).

The Bechada family is well-attested in Limousin as early as the late eleventh century. Bechada knights and monks served the Lastours, members of the local high nobility, Geoffrey of Vigeois himself being a kinsman to them. The latter's testimony looks all the more accurate as Gouffier's feats at Ma'arrat-an-Nu'man are confirmed by other sources, which have him as the first crusader ever to enter the town. The same warrior is also mentioned in the short preserved fragment of the Occitan version of the *Song of Antioch* (l. 664, 667) and in several passages of the same poem translated into Castilian in the late thirteenth century, making him, on the face of it, a major protagonist in the taking of Ma'arrat-an-Nu'man. His name also crops up in two medieval legends as the companion of a lion he saved from suicide, and the saviour, after a duel, of a queen of France unfairly charged with adultery. These details have caused critics to equate Grégoire Bechada's 'long book' with the *Song of Antioch*.⁷³ Indeed, the accuracy of Geoffroi's reflection on his own literary activity is most remarkable for a work of the turn of the twelfth century. The part of Gregoire's liege, Gouffier de Lastours, in the *Song of Antioch* provides further evidence. It is therefore very likely that he did write the—now largely lost—original in the *langue d'oc*, and did take part in the First Crusade beside his lord.

A century later, it was another knight of humble extraction who followed his lord to the Crusade: Robert de Clari (Cléry-lès-Pernois, in the area of the Somme), a vassal to Pierre d'Amiens, with whom he was to ride

⁷³ Sweetenham and Paterson, 'Introduction' to their ed. of *Canso d'Antiocha*, 5–16.

in the Balkans expedition between 1201 and 1205. It was in 1215 in Picardy that he 'had the truth on the conquest of Constantinople put in writing', a conquest he took part in, along with his brother, clerk Aléaume. However, he goes on to say that he 'did not tell it as well as many an author (*diteur*, 'one who dictates', §120)'. This is by no means an instance of false modesty: Robert had no literary, Latin, or clerical culture, and at best drew on the versified stories he had heard from the jongleurs. His prose narrative is, however, all the more vivid and artless for it. It was that simplicity that reassured his audience about his trustworthiness as eyewitness to incredibly glorious military deeds. But for all his realism, Robert never fails to recount the miracles and wonders he heard of in the East. His taste for anecdotes is not incompatible with his criticism of barons and other high nobles whose ambition and greed pervert the very spirit of the Crusades.⁷⁴

Robert de Clari was one of the lesser knights who took part in the Fourth Crusade, but Geoffroi de Villehardouin (c. 1148–c. 1218), born in the Troyes area, was one of its main leaders. Like Robert, he 'dictated' (§120, 218), around 1215, his *Conquest of Constantinople* in French verses. However, unlike Robert, he expresses the viewpoint of those warlords who led the Crusade aside from the Holy Land to sack the Second Rome, incurring papal excommunication in the process. He even justifies the act in an interesting case of *pro domo* pleading, since he was instrumental in the crusaders' choosing that option, which was to earn him a marshalate of Romany (Greece) in 1205, and then the lordship of Messinopolis (Thrace). Even as he recounts in chronological fashion the details of the expedition from 1198 to 1207, he unhesitatingly stages himself as ambassador, negotiator, or warrior. By means of his style, at once simple, laconic, and passionate, he strives hard to convince his readership of the legitimacy of the Fourth Crusade as well as the qualities of its leader, Boniface de Montferrat (d. 1207). He considers his apology to carry all the more weight as he claims he has 'been on all councils' (§120) where the main decisions were taken which were eventually to result in the creation of the Latin Empire of the East. Nevertheless, he also settles scores with the perjurers and villeins who cast a stain on such a glorious deed.⁷⁵ All in all, his narrative is as oriented as his life toward the service of the Crusade.

⁷⁴ Dufournet, 'Introduction' to his ed. of Robert of Clari, *La Conquête*, 7–34.

⁷⁵ Dufournet, 'Présentation' to his ed. of Geoffroi de Villehardouin, *La Conquête*, 9–33; Zink, *La Subjectivité littéraire*, 209–210, Berthelot, *Figures et fonction de l'écrivain*, 225–33.

At the beginning of his book, Geoffroi de Villehardouin mentions those noblemen who decide to take up the cross after listening to the preaching of Foulque, the parish priest of Neuilly-sur-Marne, near Paris. In September 1201, the preacher went to the General Chapter of the Cîteaux order, where he eventually convinced several northern French barons to leave for the Holy Land. Among them, Geoffroi mentions 'Hugues de Berzé[-le-Châtel, in Mâconnais], father and son' (§45). Born *c.* 1150–1170, the latter left five songs and the *Bible to the Lord of Berzé*, a moral and satirical poem in 1,028 octosyllabic verses which he wrote when he returned from Burgundy shortly before his death *c.* 1220. The Crusade was at the very heart of the song he dedicated between 1215 and 1219 to troubadour Falquet de Romans (d. 1233), urging him to break away from his mundane milieu and sail overseas with him. It is also the subject matter of some thirty verses in his *Bible*, where he ponders the ineluctability of death, presses his reader to conversion and criticizes the world's perversion, in the process stigmatizing the blemishes of various religious orders. He mentions the four emperors of Constantinople he saw die within less than eighteen months, and the numerous most courageous warriors killed before his own eyes (l. 416–452).⁷⁶ Unlike Robert de Clari or Geoffroi de Villehardouin, Hugues de Berzé did not leave a narrative of the *Conquest of Constantinople*, even though he took part in the event. Nevertheless, he was deeply affected by the event, as evidenced in his *Bible* where he mentions it in support of his message of conversion. His experience as a crusader is put to good use in recounting an *exemplum*, or moralizing anecdote, which becomes all the more credible as it had been experienced by the teller himself.

Philip of Novara, born *c.* 1195 into a knightly family from Lombardy, was still young when he left for the Middle East. In 1218, he took part in the conquest of Damietta on the Nile delta, and subsequently was in the service of the Ibelins, lords of Beirut and bailiffs of Cyprus, till his death after 1264, whom he supported militarily, but also through his legal skills. According to the *Assises of Jerusalem*, an enormous compilation of legislation, legal doctrine, and jurisprudence relating to the Holy Land, Hugues de Brienne (d. 1296), an unsuccessful candidate for the throne of Cyprus, considers him 'the best pleader on this shore of the sea' (t. 2, p. 406). Indeed, Philip does give the impression of a formidable advocate and a shrewd negotiator, one who was entrusted with several embassies by the kings and barons of Cyprus. He even wrote a feudal law treatise entitled

⁷⁶ Lecoy, 'Introduction' to his ed. of Hugues de Berzé, *Bible*, 22–26, 'Pour la chronologie'.

Livre à un sien ami en forme de plaid ('Book to a friend of his as a plea'), preserved in the *Assises of Jerusalem*. Such a legal knowledge, considerably weightier than average, is likely to have been acquired in the northern Italian schools, which he must have attended along with the sons of other urban knights. Was it there that he learned the French language he used in all his books? The most plausible hypothesis is that he learned the rudiments of it at that time, and developed fluency later on, through everyday use of it among the Franks overseas.

In his *Livre à un sien ami*, Philip relates a memory from his youth. During the siege of Damietta, two lords found him exceptionally gifted in reading romances aloud. One of them would often call on him, because he was an insomniac and desired to spend his nights listening to stories (p. 525). No doubt Philip did have a literary culture: in particular he makes satirical use of the characters in *Romance of Renart* to relate the fighting between Guelphs and Ghibellines in Cyprus. Similarly, albeit less humorously, a taste for romance causes the Latin noblemen in the Holy Land to adopt the personages of fictional heroes, whose adventures they stage during festivals. In the *War of Frederick II in the East*, Philip describes the merrymaking that followed the dubbing of the two sons of Jean d'Ibelin (d. 1237) in Cyprus in 1223: 'Then started the greatest, longest merrymaking ever seen overseas, spending being so lavish. During the jousting tournament, the adventures of the Matter of Britain and the Round Table were imitated in many a game' (§16). Philip was already in the Ibelins' service, and could well have been instrumental in the choosing of the Arthurian theme. His testimony is all the more valuable for being the earliest on a Table Round-themed tournament. Noteworthy is the precociousness of the overseas nobility in this field.

At the end of his life Philip was to write the *Four Ages of Man*, a moral and pedagogical treatise, complete with anecdotes and proverbs. In his epilogue, he reviewed his complete works, recalling the three types of songs he had composed as he grew older: first those on 'that great mundane folly called love', then those composed for propaganda purposes against Frederick II and in favour of his liege Jean d'Ibelin, and lastly those on 'Our Lord, Our Blessed Lady, and the saints' (§233). Following a stereotyped pattern, the author presents himself as a young man in love, a politically conscious forty-year-old, and eventually an old cleric, the ages defining the parts of his work. The same passage mentions his *Memoirs*, only a fragment of which has survived. In it, Philip described his youth in Lombardy, his departure on the Crusade, the political strife that broke out on account of the minority of Henry I of Lusignan (1218–1254),

king of Cyprus, and the war against Frederick II and his Ghibelline partisans. The surviving passages show him to be a passionate, optimistic figure, always ready to present an enthusiastic account of the most striking events of his time, and to extol lords and friends. He likes to include in this prose autobiography the poems, especially political, which he had composed in support of his friends and members of his party. His readers have always been grateful to him for all that, since they have copied them, along with his most topical pages, those that dealt with such events—like the Guelph and Ghibellines struggles in the Holy Land—as they deemed most influential in the history of their times. By contrast, they have forgotten his more personal narratives, now forever lost.⁷⁷

A nobleman of ancient stock, Jean de Joinville (1225–1317), hereditary seneschal of Champagne, wrote between 1305 and 1309 a *Life of Saint Louis*, which he claims was commissioned by Queen Jeanne of France (1270–1305), the wife of Philip IV ‘le Bel’ (1285–1314) (§2, 18). Maybe the commissioning justified, for the author himself, an activity that, being largely autobiographic, was pleasant, if not self-serving.⁷⁸ Indeed, the book often puts forward, albeit with false modesty, the special relation its author claims, in retrospect, to have enjoyed with the king.⁷⁹ It is nonetheless truthful for all that: for it is with the greatest simplicity and candour that Joinville, now in his eighties, recounts his memories. The details he gives on the events he witnessed are accurate and credible, with anecdotes galore being included: everyone recalls the king walking after Mass to the oak tree at Vincennes where he was accustomed to listen to complainants, without his ushers interfering (§59). The book, however, found hardly any readership in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, suggesting that memoirs and other such autobiographic works were in actual fact frowned upon in those days.

Joinville had a smattering of Latin and was able to write a commentary on the *Credo* and quote Bible verses and liturgical orations. Of course, he was himself a master of writing technique, as the quick and firm script of five charters bearing his handwritten apostil shows. He claims, however, that he had his *Life of Saint Louis* written down by a scribe (§768). As noted by Jacques Monfrin, the latest and most notable editor of the book, his unaffected style reflects orality (pp. 5, 22). The artless forthrightness is

⁷⁷ Zink, *La Subjectivité littéraire*, 212–219.

⁷⁸ Berthelot, *Figures et fonction de l'écrivain*, 163–164.

⁷⁹ ‘When he speaks about the king, he is only speaking about himself’, Zink, *Littérature française*, 193.

instrumental in the glorification of the freshly canonized Louis IX, whom Joinville literally worships. He had divided his book into two parts articulated around the king's persona: the first one recording his virtuous deeds, 'his holy words and good teachings to edify those who will hear' (§19); the second one recounting his high military feats and chivalrous bravery in war. Joinville made his memories of the Crusade and of his stay in the Holy Land with the king between 1248 and 1254 central to his work, occupying over 550 paragraphs out of the total 769. This again speaks volumes on the role of the overseas adventure in the genesis of the knight memoir genre.

The Catalan-Italian wars around the Mediterranean

Military campaigns in the Mediterranean are also at the core of two chronicles written in Catalan *c.* 1300. This is the beginning of the first one: 'Here begins the book that sire Bernard Desclot dictated and wrote on high feats and conquests to the detriment of the Saracens and other people, accomplished by the noble kings of Aragon, of the high lineage of the counts of Barcelona'. The author also claims he had seen the spear that a knight from Navarre had nailed onto the saddle of King Peter III (1276–1285) in August 1285 outside Gerona in one of the battles of the French Crusade against Catalonia (§159). These brief mentions in the chronicle are not sufficient clues to identify its author, whose name appears in no diplomatic document. However, Bernard Desclot has been—perhaps wrongly—identified as Bernat Escrivà (d. 1289), the descendant of a family of bailiffs, judges, and royal notaries who came from Roussillon and who settled in Valencia area after the conquest in the 1230'. Desclot became Peter III's high treasurer in 1282, and minister of chamber to Alfonso III (1285–1291).⁸⁰ Indeed, he appears as a familiar of the king of Aragon, knows the minutes in his archives, and looks up the Catalan and Castilian chronicles in his library. By the same token, scholars seem to detect in his fine, simple, and clear-cut prose the suggestion that he had served as a notary and a chancellor as well. Even though he describes military operations in great detail, it is impossible to tell whether or not he himself had experience in combat. His lack of interest in spiritual and ecclesiastical matters would seem to rule out the assumption that he might have been a clerk.

⁸⁰ Coll, 'Introduction' to the ed. of Bernat Desclot, t. 1, 123–174. Cf. *contra* J. Aurell, *The Power of Form*.

Bernat Desclot wrote the first draft of his book between 1280 and 1286, and was to give it an in-depth revision over the next two years. His first chapters record certain legends attaching to the House of Barcelona in the twelfth century, with special emphasis on weddings and births (§1–10). The chronicler then focuses on the reign of James I (1213–1276) and his strife against the Aragonese nobility and against Castile, but especially on his conquests of the Muslim kingdoms of Majorca and Valencia (§11–73). He is even more familiar with the events of Peter III's short reign, sometimes having been an eyewitness to them or at least having spoken to reliable informants: the Tunisian expedition, the occupation of Sicily in the aftermath of the Vesper revolt (1282), the war against the Angevins of Naples, the failure of the duel against the king and Charles I of Anjou intended at Bordeaux, and the defence of Catalonia in the 1285 Crusade (§74–168). His ideological programme is simple and clear: to magnify the royal house of Barcelona, whose members are always seen as heroic and chivalrous in conflict, and fair and loyal in government. In the process, Desclot disparages their Guelph and French enemies, who were hostile to Catalonia's expansion into Italy. He criticizes any person who rebels against the Aragonese royal house, and advocates that their powers should be reinforced. Thus past history as well as current events were turned to propaganda for the benefit of Peter III by a writer of his own court.⁸¹

In his Catalan narrative, the writer Ramon Muntaner (1265–1336) also focuses on the Mediterranean conquests of the kings of Aragon and their troops.⁸² His career is well-known on account of the partly autobiographic nature of his *Chronicle* and of some hundred Acts where he is mentioned, especially in the royal chancellery. Muntaner was descended from the low nobility of northern Catalonia. According to him, his own father once welcomed King James I and his son-in-law Alfonso X of Castile in his tower house at Peralada (Empordà). But the 1285 French invasion having laid his estate waste, he was forced to leave and followed Peter III, whom he served, subsequently being granted another estate in the kingdom of Valencia. He was later to settle in Majorca, then in Sicily. In 1302, he was the intendant of the Catalan company, which was headed by Roger de Flor (d. 1305), a defrocked knight Templar, and composed of knights and *almogavars*, a formidable troop of mostly Pyrenean foot soldiers. As such, he took part in their expedition in the Balkans and Asia Minor, which led to the creation of the dukedom of Athens and Neopatria, ruled by an Ara-

⁸¹ Cingolani, *Historiografia, propaganda, comunicació*.

⁸² For a recent study, see Cingolani, *La Memòria dels reis*, 159–193.

gonese infante. Between 1309 and 1315, Muntaner was governor of the island of Jerba in the name of Frederick III (1295–1337), king of Sicily, of the house of Barcelona. Back in his estate of Xirivella (Valencia), he wrote his *Chronicle* between 1325 and 1328, after which he left again for the kingdom of Majorca, and died in 1336 in Ibiza. A knight who fought the Saracens, the Byzantines, and the Balkans Franks, a royal officer, an indefatigable traveller, Ramon, like so many others, felt the urge in his last days to commit his memoirs to writing.

Ramon Muntaner justifies his *Chronicle* by reference to express divine intervention. Using an old literary device that goes back at least to Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, he opens his book by telling of the dream of a white-clad old man who instructs him to start working (§1). He was to begin his drafting even as King James II of Aragon (1291–1327) and his son, the Infante Alfonso, were preparing their expedition against Sardinia. He composed a *Sermon*, in monorhymed twelve-syllable verses, in the desire that both of them might benefit from his own military experience, and included it in the *Chronicle* he completed a few months later at the age of sixty. The book opens with the narrative of James I's quasi-miraculous begetting (§3–6), then proceeds with his conquest of Majorca and Valencia (§7–28), and that of Sicily by Peter III (§29–150). After recording the wars against France and Castile waged by his successors (§151–192), he concludes with the Eastern expedition of Roger de Flor and his *almogavars*, of whom, he says, 'the high feats are to be put to the credit of the House of Aragon'. He then goes on to say: 'What impelled me to write this book are Roger de Flor's adventures, and the victories of the Catalans and Aragonese in Romany' (§193). This statement is rather surprising, in view of the relatively low importance given to the Eastern expedition, which takes up less than one sixth of the whole book (§194–244). Still, it is very much in keeping with the fondness for Crusade narratives that is so frequently manifest in the works of French thirteenth-century autobiographers. The *Chronicle*'s final chapters mainly deal with the Iberian reconquest, the wars between Naples and Sicily, and the author's sea voyages between Jerba, Sicily, the Balearic islands, Catalonia, and the kingdom of Valencia (§245–271). The conclusion is comprised of the above-mentioned verse *Sermon* for the Sardinia expedition, the record of that military campaign and the crowning of Alfonso IV of Aragon in 1328 (§272–298).

Ramon Muntaner's taste for literature is obvious and surfaces in two long lists of epic and Arthurian heroes whose feats of arms he claims do not stand up to Peter III's: Roland, Olivier, Tristan, Lancelot, Gawain,

Perceval of Wales, Galéas (Galehaut or Galahad ?), Palamede, Bohort, Estort de Mares, Morat de Gaunes, and the 'Chevalier à la Cotte Mau-taillée' (§51, 134). His *Chronicle* is sometimes reminiscent of a Round Table romance read out aloud, as Muntaner throws in repeated calls for the audience's attention. He also inserts a number of dialogues, almost always made up, but which were clearly meant to help oral recitation. There are anecdotes galore, for example the narrative of Roger de Flor's irresistible rise, a tale which certainly does not lack in vividness. Roger, the son of one of Emperor Frederick II's German falconers who had been killed in the battle of Tagliacozzo (1268), lived in poverty as a child, his father having been dispossessed of his estate by the Angevins. He was playing beside the vessels docked in Brindisi harbour when a Templar knight from Marseilles noticed him and asked the child's mother permission to take him along with him overseas. He became a Templar knight himself, turned to piracy against the kingdom of Naples and eventually won the king of Sicily's confidence (§194). These vignettes are supplemented by vivid descriptions of battles and sailing.

The flip side of Ramon Muntaner's literary talent is that his imagination causes truthfulness to take a back seat to invention. Facts are knowingly distorted, including those he had been eyewitness to, and even more so when some personal liability of his was involved. The *almogavars'* crimes are left unspoken or simply justified in the name of Roger de Flor's treacherous murder by the Emperor of Byzantium. Frictions within that ragtag army of knight and mercenaries are also left unmentioned. The author unhesitatingly inflates his own military feats (§253) and glorifies even more those of the house of the kings of Barcelona, whose conquests represent a case of Manifest Destiny, 'Peter III's feats not being a knight's work, but God's' (§134). The king of Aragon's sacredness shows up at the very beginning of the book in the story of James I's quasi-miraculous begetting (§3–6). It is later manifested in a final apotheosis of sorts, in the narrative of the dubbing and crowning of Alfonso IV that closes the book: the description of the rite is at once accurate and theatrically enthusiastic; its staging sets the king in an upper, almost heavenly world (§297). From cover to cover, the author flaunts his devotion to royalty.

Ramon Muntaner claims to have written his *Chronicle* not for himself but for his liege: 'I shall not tell you about that which happened to me, unless it relates to my lords' own accomplishments' (§255). Such a claim should be put in perspective, given the autobiographical character of many a chapter. It does, nevertheless, bear witness to a lesser nobleman's faithfulness to the kings of Aragon, Majorca, and Sicily as he puts his military

and administrative know-how to their service, getting offices and fiefdoms in return. This devotion to the reigning dynasty goes hand in hand with a form of patriotism, expressed in his dual praise of the Catalans, 'who never put their victories down to their own talents, but to God Almighty' and 'who have always wanted justice to reign in their midst' (§1). His admiration for the beauties of the Catalan language (*bell catalanesc*), spoken by the colonizers from Murcia as well as by the Italians who learnt it in the retinue of Constance of Hohenstaufen, the wife of Peter III, shows a similar mindset (§17–18). All in all, what we have is an autobiographical work with a particular focus on the manipulation of historiography in the service of royal propaganda. Did the book successfully fulfil such a function? We can doubt it in view of the book's low diffusion, at least in written form: only three manuscripts were copied from it within the two decades following its writing. All of them were commissioned by the Barcelona chancellery, but there is no suggestion of knowledge of the book in the *Chronicle* of Peter IV of Aragon (1336–1387). Indeed, a lack of interest from their authors' contemporaries seems to be the common fate of knightly autobiographies.

In the late thirteenth century, several communal chronicles were written in Italy. It was in the vernacular that they continued the annals written in Latin in Genoa or Pisa in the twelfth century, with a view to developing their readers' civic consciousness. Between 1267 and 1275, it was French that Martino da Canal chose for his *Histories of Venice*, a city whose Eastern expansion he extols. This prestigious language was used at the time by merchants and Eastern crusaders, but also by Arthurian romance writers, who were very popular in Italy: 'because the French language travels all over the world, and is more pleasant to read or hear than any other' (I, 3), Martino wrote. He calls himself *maistre*, quite probably a teacher or notary, but whether or not he wore arms we cannot possibly tell. It was also in French that Rusticello da Pisa drafted the *Book of Wonders* (1298) that Venetian Marco Polo (1254–1324), a merchant, spy, and ambassador for his city, dictated to him. This Far East travel narrative, or more accurately collection of anecdotes, legends, and tales picked up on the way, was to enjoy exceptionally wide diffusion and to enhance Venice's prestige enormously.⁸³ Even so, it does not belong to the genre of communal historiography, as practiced by Martino da Canal.

It was around the same time that Florence produced two chronicles relating the history of the city in Italian. One was written in 1310–1312 by

⁸³ Bologna, 'La letteratura', 184–187.

Dino Compagni (c. 1255–1324); it mostly dealt with the strife between the local Black and White parties, which he describes and analyses as passionately as befits a concerned player. He was descended from a draper family from *popolo grasso*, a nobility-free urban elite. The other, entitled *New Chronicle* (1322–1341), was authored by Giovanni Villani, who focused on a larger time span. His attachment to his city is quite obvious in the glorious origins he claims for it: he traces its foundations as far back as the Trojans. Villani introduces himself as ‘a great philosopher and Master Supreme of Rhetoric’, bent on teaching the Florentines through history, the art of governance (9.10). A merchant and banker, he belonged to a ‘popular’ family and held the office that took charge of communal prayer.

These examples of local Italian city historians, who may have worn arms even though they had never been dubbed, could be multiplied for the fourteenth century.⁸⁴ Mediaevalists call them ‘chronicler-notaries’ on account of the public offices they occupied. The label highlights their professional culture, which made them familiar with writing and law and gave them access to the local archives. Moreover, it points to the fully notarial authenticity their fellow citizens acknowledged for their historiographical works, all the more so when these were given solemn endorsement in an open ceremony. This public approval could only broaden the ideological scope of their discourses, which proclaimed to encourage civic awareness in their fellow citizens, or even to foster localism and hence hostility to neighbouring cities.⁸⁵

The writer-knights were to be found at every rung of the noble hierarchy. The high nobility was well represented among the troubadours, trouvères, and *Minnesänger*. For counts, viscounts, and other princes, composing and interpreting songs was a badge of distinction. The court admired their creations and performances, their newly acquired prestige increasing, in turn, their authority within the aristocracy, and even lower down among the bourgeoisie and peasantry. The real hotbed of writers, however, was to be found within the less prestigious nobility: poor Occitan knights, French *vavasseurs*, armed Italian citizens, or German ministerials would take to writing more often than their liege lords. They wrote not only short songs, but also long romances, chronicles, and autobiographies. This cultured lesser nobility provided the king with warriors who

⁸⁴ On the other hand, Ricardo’s (d. c. 1281) and Giacotto Malaspina’s impossible paternity of the *Florentine History* must be acknowledged again. Barnes, ‘Un problema’.

⁸⁵ Bordone and Garofani, ‘Les chroniqueurs italiens’, 179–180.

could write, who thus became indispensable for laying a solid foundation for the bureaucratic state.

The pragmatic writing of the Royal Officers passed quite naturally into literary and historiographical creation. The same pen that recorded acts, minutes, laws, and accounts in the chancelleries also came to serve literature. Even if political propaganda is always present in the songs, romances and histories of these authors, who would serve their princes or cities in war or administration as well as by composing literary fiction, this propaganda is not at all incompatible with poetic intuition and aesthetic goals. Moreover, it becomes inextricably tangled with religiosity, especially in the case of Crusade narratives. Paradoxical as it may appear, it is amid the sound and the fury of warfare, in the course of their Eastern trials and tribulations, that knights' minds opened to the world. Their mentalities then evolved, and this could only benefit their writing.

LEARNED WOMEN

Around 1250, in the short antiquarian romance *Floris and Lyriope*, troubère Robert de Blois drew up a list of the arts the heroine, the daughter of the duke of Thebes, learned from the fine education she received. 'Lyriope could carry and train falcon, goshawk, or tercel, play chess and tric-trac, read out romances and tell stories, sing songs and merry poems: in short, she knew all those sciences a noblewoman should master' (l. 231–238). Reading, recitation, and singing are all part and parcel of Lyriope's education, as are games and falconry. A minimal amount of literary instruction, poetic skills, and musical ear is a prerequisite for the fictional character. Did the same go for real flesh and blood twelfth- and thirteenth-century maids whose parents insisted they should be fully socialized?

The education of girls

Like boys, girls were taught the rudiments of reading at home, most often by their mothers. From the 1320s onwards, the iconographic theme of Saint Anne teaching the young Virgin Mary to read reflects a familiar scene in aristocratic circles. The image originates neither in the Apocryphal Gospels nor in folk hagiography as popularized in the Dominican Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend*, but from some unknown tradition. Its earliest representation might be the one found in a 1325–1330 prayer book that once belonged to the countess of Leicester. In this miniature, Saint Anne is protecting the child with her cloak, and the child is pointing to a page in a book showing the letters of the word *Domine* ('O Lord') in separate squares (Oxford Bodleian Library, ms Douce 231, fol. 3). In England again, an altar side-cloth, embroidered in the 1320s–1340s, has the image of a standing Anne pointing at the manuscript that Mary is opening (London, Victoria and Albert Museum). In later representations, it is the abecedary that her mother is handing over to the Virgin Mary.⁸⁶ The iconographic theme of Mary's being initiated to reading testifies to the didactic role—even for boys—that conventional wisdom has mothers play. It also reflects the special link that daughters keep with their mothers within the intimacy of the domestic space.

⁸⁶ Green, *Women Readers*, 87–88, 121; Sheingorn, 'The Wise Mother', 70, 76.

Preceptors and schools

Some of these girls would, sooner or later, leave their mothers to be entrusted to a preceptor. For all its exceptional starkness, matching the quality of the master's work, the story of Pierre Abelard and Heloise is no less evidence of private tutors being assigned to teach young women. The names of some such preceptors are preserved in lists of charters; for example Matthew, who was to become bishop of Angers, educated Sibille and Mathilde, the sisters of Count Geoffrey Plantagenet (d. 1151), for whom he occasionally also served as scribe.⁸⁷

Similar masters also make their appearance in fiction. Gottfried von Strassburg has Iseult trained by a 'cleric' (*pfaffe*) and 'master' (*meister*) from the entourage of her queen mother. A musician and a master of languages, he teaches her French and Latin and how to play stringed instruments. Soon he gives up his post to Tristan, who will teach the young maiden how to compose all manner of songs (l. 7695–8079). In around 1230, the Anglo-Norman romance *Guy of Warwick* recounts how Felice, the count's daughter, soaks up astronomy, arithmetic, and geometry thanks to several 'whitened and wizened masters' from Toledo: thus she becomes "enlettered" in all the arts' (l. 64–68). Iseult's linguistic and musical training relates more to a classical tutorship than to the more sophisticated *quadrivium*—the four natural or 'hard' sciences (arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy)—Felice is taught in her own home. Could the author of *Guy of Warwick* have borrowed the theme from the literature of his own time, which praised the magic and astrological lore mastered by Oriental women?

More fittingly in the medieval context of gender separation, young girls are often taught by mistresses (*magistræ*). King John Lackland entrusted his younger daughter Eleanor to Cecilia of Sandford (d. 1251), who was later to become preceptress to Jane of Mountchesney, another lady of the high Anglo-Norman aristocracy. Matthew Paris seems to have known Cecilia well, since his *Chronica Majora* records her dying near Saint Albans, where she is buried 'in a stone sarcophagus before Saint Andrew's altar'. Her eulogy is particularly emphatic: 'a most sainted woman', 'noble-blooded, even more noble-mannered'; she had been the wife of William of Gorham and the mother of his son of the same name,

⁸⁷ *Matheus, magister sororum mearum, qui hoc cirographum scripsit, Livre blanc de Saint-Florent de Saumur* (Archives of the Maine-et-Loire département H 3713), fol. 48 (29 VI 1130), partly ed. E. Mabille, 'Introduction' to *Chroniques d'Anjou*, XL.

both of them knights. She devoted her long widowhood to God after taking a public oath of chastity, symbolized by the ring she would not even take off on her death bed when asked to do so by her Dominican confessor. 'A most learned, courtly and eloquent lady, she had been chosen as mistress and reformer of Eleanor, the king's sister' (t. 5, pp. 235–236). The duenna's portrait is quite accurate and revives the category of those widows of knights, well-learned and morally irreproachable, who used to educate and chaperon young maidens within their milieu.

One of the key characters in Chrétien de Troyes' *Cligès* is the fairy Thessala. Her behaviour belongs to the romance register of transgression, miles away from the rigorousness of Cecilia of Sandford and her likes. Thessala is the 'mistress (*mestre*) of Fenice, whom she had raised as a child and who was well versed in magic' (l. 2984–2986). Her witchcraft will cause the maiden and Cligès, the hero she loves, to overcome the obstacles to their union. Thessala brews up a magic potion for the husband imposed upon Fenice, who thereafter will be able to possess her only in the fantasies triggered by the hallucinatory drink. A second philtre is given to the young woman herself, who then enters a death-like cataleptic state, only to elope, after a mock burial, with her lover with whom she lives for a long time before their wedding. The two drinks may reveal underlying collective fear of the lore held by a few old crones (*vetulæ*) secretly initiated into witchcraft and having acquired a long life experience. Indeed, only incidentally does Thessala reflect the social type of the learned nursemaid. Nevertheless, she does maintain a lifelong love link with the woman she educated in childhood.

In urban centres, girls can attend parish schools, or, in Italy, communal schools. Thomas de Cantimpré (1200–1272), a Dominican from the duchy of Brabant, which was renowned for its network of schools, relates a significant anecdote in his *Book of Bees*, a collection of *exempla* or anecdotes for preaching. A very poor girl is yearning to learn how to read from the psalter. However, her father, being hardly able to scrape together a living, cannot possibly afford to buy one for her. For all of one year, she prays to the Blessed Virgin, who eventually comes to her in a dream, holding two psalters in her hand, and asks her to choose one. When she wakes up, there is no book at all nearby. In frustration, she complains again to her father, who advises her to go and learn on Sundays and holidays, when she does not have to work, from 'the mistress who teaches the psalter to rich girls'. Then the wealthy matrons in the parish take pity on her and all go Dutch, first to buy her the book, then to pay the rent of the reclusory where she retires from the world (I, 23, 3). The anecdote at least bears

witness to the existence of parish schools for patrician daughters, run by a mistress, whose main task is to teach the rudiments of reading.

The *Tale of Floire and Blancheflor*, one of the very earliest (1150–1160) known French romances, looks less realistic in its Oriental and antiquarian setting. Its anonymous author relates the love story of its teenage student protagonists: ‘When they came back from school, they would take their ivory tablets to write, on wax, love letters and verses [...]. In five years and ten days only, both of them found themselves so well-educated that they could speak Latin and write on a parchment in that language’ (l. 255–270). Exotic as it may be, the tale provides quite accurate details on the learning of writing, first by means of a stylus on wax-covered tablets that were easy to erase, then with ink on expensive parchment. It also seems to imply the existence of co-educational schools, even though this is most unlikely for medieval teenagers. All we have as testimony is, in Matthew Paris’s *Chronica Majora*, the mention of a golden ring, engraved with the initials RA and mounted with an eastern sapphire, which was kept in his monastery. The jewel had been offered to Richard Animal by Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine, ‘who in youth used to be his schoolfriend.’⁸⁸

Twelfth- and thirteenth-century writers often fantasize about Oriental palaces and the young maidens kept locked up in them. These are as beautiful as learned in sciences that are often esoteric in nature. *Gauffrey*, a *chanson de geste* that constituted, c. 1200, a sequel to *Doon of Mayence*, is highly laudatory of the Saracen woman Fleurdépine: ‘At only fourteen years and a half of age, she could speak Latin, understand the Romance language, play tric-trac and chess, and follow the courses of stars and the shining moon’ (l. 1793–1796). Another epic, the *Song of Gerard of Roussillon*, portrays Berthe, the Byzantium emperor’s daughter, as something of a bluestocking, as her father ‘has her learn liberal arts; she can speak Chaldaic, Greek, Romance, Latin, and Hebrew’ (l. 237–239). Last, in the *Romance of Partonopeu of Blois* (1175–1200), Melior, also the daughter of a basileus, has by the age of fifteen surpassed her worthy masters, who taught her not only writing but the seven liberal arts, medicine, herb-based pharmacy, theology, Old and New Testament exegesis, astronomy, as well as necromancy and all enchantments (l. 4576–4606). She proves to be indeed a very successful magician.

⁸⁸ *Quia conscolares in sua juventute extiterant et sodales*, *ibid.*, t. 6, p. 385. Matthew Paris drew the ring beside his text, and a reproduction can be found in *English Romanesque*, 291.

Blanchefleur, Fleurdépine, Berthe, and Mélior are young Oriental women. Their culture fascinated French writers, conscious that they are of the superiority of the urban civilization of the empire of Constantinople and Islam. The wealth of knowledge accumulated in that area of the Mediterranean, which had not experienced the violent upheavals of the West, was all the more attractive in their eyes. Sometimes it takes on the trappings—thrilling, but also almost as unsettling as a pact with the devil—of necromancy and magic, which represent a challenge to the laws of nature. A leitmotiv of these epics is the conversion and subsequent wedding of the Muslim woman jailer, seduced by the hero of the song, for it is characteristic of the genre to extol the beauty and manners of these foreigners. In fiction, however, erudite education is by no means reserved for exotic women. According to Renaud de Bagé, Belle aux Blanchés Mains, the heiress to the castle of the Isle of Or, ‘had learned the seven liberal arts, enchantments, how to observe the stars, and white and black magic’ (l. 1933–1935). The traditional knowledge of the *trivium* and *quadrivium* is thus supplemented by witchcraft in the case of the White-Handed Fairy. In the *Lai of the Two Lovers* (1155–1200), Marie de France mentions an aunt of the Norman heroine’s ‘who has been living in Salerno for the past thirty years, and practices medicine, brewing her potions from herbs and roots’ (VI, l. 103–108). The Campanian city was in those days famous for its medical school, where several gynaecology treatises had been compiled, these being mythically attributed to Trotula, the most famous, albeit most likely legendary, medieval woman-doctor.

Convent education

Morgan le Fay, half-sister of Arthur, is a key figure in the Matter of Britain. Her knowledge and intelligence are such that she cures injuries with magical ointments and she even captivates Merlin the Magician. In the twelfth century, according to Geoffrey of Monmouth and Chrétien de Troyes, this fairy was mysteriously introduced to esoteric knowledge in the islands of Beyond. In the thirteenth-century fiction, however, even if Merlin personally offers her a part of his science, the story of her education fits into a more realistic framework. Around 1205–1210, *Merlin*, attributed to Robert de Boron, says that Morgan was exclusively educated in a convent (α, §72). An anonymous and longest version of this romance, written twenty years later, gives more details on her studies. King Uther Pendragon, her father, decided ‘after a family council to school his daughter, so that she could learn letters,’ i.e. how to read in Latin, a prerequisite

of all knowledge. She is therefore sent to a parish school, perhaps near her castle, unless the expression 'to school' only refers to the teaching of a tutor or a chaplain. She is afterwards sent 'to a religious house, where she learned the arts so well' that she became an expert in astronomy and physics (B, §172). For the anonymous author of *Merlin*, monasteries provide a more thorough education, even in natural sciences, than do parish schools.

In convents as in parish schools, however, the education received by girls is mostly meant to make them familiar with Scripture and liturgical texts, so that they can take part in choir offices beside the vowed nuns and deepen their own meditation. Nevertheless it did not merely provide them with a thin varnish of religious culture, which probably must have been the case for parish schools whose schedules and calendars were more flexible and less intense in comparison with convents. The monials taught them a solid amount of Latin and classical literature, and a smattering of the *quadrivium* sciences as well. That is the reason why monastic education usually enjoyed higher prestige than home or local school education.

A number of convents show intellectual vigour in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In Rhineland, numerous houses were founded from 1100 onwards that followed the flexible rule of Saint Augustine and which catered for nuns from the low ministerial nobility. These monasteries were associated with houses of regular canons, who would administer sacraments to the nuns and oversee their spiritual welfare and development. In 1107, Benigna, a woman from the ministerial class, founded Springiersbach, in the Trier diocese, on this basis. Twelve years later, her own son Richard of Springiersbach (d. 1158) set up a similar community in Andernach, which he handed over to Tenxwinde (d. 1152). The narrative that was composed to commemorate the foundation claims her to be 'his sister in flesh and spirit, a very gifted woman as regards her intelligence of regular life as well as her teaching of divine knowledge'. Significantly, Tenxwinde was to hold the title of mistress in Andernach, a token of her educative role, rather than abbess or prioress.

Other women in charge of Augustinian establishments appoint themselves mistresses. Such was the case of Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), *magistra* of the monastery of Rupertsberg, a subordinate of the abbey of Disibodenberg.⁸⁹ In her *Autobiography*, she relates how she offered herself to God at the age of eight and joined a hermitage adjacent to Disibodenberg. Her superior, Jutta of Sponheim (d. 1136), then used a psalter to improve the girl's Latin. However, her real 'master' (*magister meus*)

⁸⁹ Mews, 'Hildegard and the schools', 93–95.

was to be the monk Volmar (d. 1173), who deepened her erudition, checked the orthodoxy of her revelations, and helped her write them down in grammatically and syntactically correct Latin (pp. 231–232). Hildegard left a considerable body of work, including the narrative of her visions, religious writings, theology treatises, books on natural sciences or pharmacy, lives of saints, poems, and numerous letters. Her contemporary Herrad (1125/30–1195), abbess of Hohenburg, or Mount Saint Odile, in Alsace, wrote the *Garden of Delights* and had it illuminated: it was an impressive encyclopaedia with poems and allegories, meant to instruct her canonesses.⁹⁰ These examples, taken only from the Germanic world and exceptional in many respects, reflect the high standards of learned knowledge in some women's monasteries. The education provided for young girls must have matched the high intellectual standards of the nuns.

Temporary educative sojourns in convents by high society ladies are well-attested. As early as the eleventh century, the name of Agnes of Weimar, wife of Frederick (d. 1042), count palatine of Saxony, is to be found among the secular canonesses of Quedlinburg Abbey. In later years, the *Goseck Chronicle* claims her to have been 'beautifully educated in letters as well as several other subjects, like the Ancients'. According to William of Malmesbury's *History of the English Kings*, Edith-Mathilda of Scotland (d. 1118), King Henry I's wife, 'was raised, from her earliest age, among the nuns at Wilton and Romsey (Wessex), where her woman's heart was trained in letters' (I, 2). Indeed, her maternal aunt Christine was at that time a nun at Wilton, where she had Edith-Mathilda 'shake with fear under her thumb', sometimes even forcing her to wear the veil, specific to celibate oblates and vowed nuns, to keep her away from her suitors (pp. 122–124). In that same monastery, the monial Muriel was a renowned poetess who traded verses with the aesthete Baudri de Bourgueil (d. 1130), bishop of Dol-de-Bretagne.⁹¹ After such training, Edith-Mathilda, once she became Queen of England, generously welcomed numerous clerks who crossed the Channel to bring their poems and melodies to her court at Westminster. She herself had a personal fondness for reading. At least this is suggested by Turgot (d. 1115), the prior of Saint Peter of Durham, whom she had commissioned to write the life of her mother Saint Margaret, in his prologue to the book: 'Not only did you wish to hear the life of your mother the Queen, but to constantly peruse it in writing.' Last, Edith-Mathilda's correspondence—even though it was edited

⁹⁰ Dronke, *Women Writers*, 144–200; Moulinier, 'H comme Histoire'.

⁹¹ Tilliette, 'Hermès amoureux', 137.

by a scribe—with such men as Anselme of Canterbury (1033/34–1109), Hildebert de Lavardin (1056–1133/34), bishop of Le Mans, or Pope Pascal II (1099–1118), demonstrates unmistakable culture that allowed her to quote not only from the Bible or the Church Fathers but also from Cicero.⁹² Agnes of Weimar or Edith-Mathilda of Scotland belong to princely families, and the historiography of their times, in spite of its emphasis on royal and high aristocracy houses in which these women were born, also highlight their monastic education. Chronicles more often obliterated less prestigious women, who might in a similar way spend also their childhood in monasteries.

Lambert d'Ardres' *History of the counts of Guines* speaks of several families of the middle nobility of Flanders. One such are the lords of Bourbourg, a castle near Dunkirk, who founded a monastery on their estate, the abbesses of which were sometimes from their own lineage. Their daughters were frequently educated there, too, like 'Beatrice (d. 1214), who was entrusted to the nuns, not only to be raised but to learn good manners and become familiar with liberal arts' (§122). In 1194, when her brother died, she became the sole heiress of Bourbourg and, 'Minerva-like as regards her learning', married Arnoul II, count of Guînes (§149). Further yet down the social ladder, in the Pyrenees county of Foix in the year 1219, the abbess of Valnègre promised the parents of a young girl named Clara that she would feed and clothe her, but also 'faithfully teach her the ecclesiastical scriptures', in the little Cistercian monastery she was in charge of.⁹³ The list of ladies who had been educated in convents could obviously be extended over the whole Western world, most of them not taking solemn vows, but eventually getting married instead.

The pedagogical function of the women's Hospitaller monastery in Sigüenza, Aragon, is particularly well-documented. It was founded in 1187 next to a house of warrior monks belonging to this order, a location that cannot but remind us of the German canonesses' twinned monasteries, which as such benefited from the teaching and manuscripts of clerics who had been trained in the cathedral schools. It was Sancha of Castile (d. 1208), the wife of King Alfonso II, who founded the monastery, where she later retired and was buried with her son Peter II and other knights who died along with him fighting against Simon de Montfort's troops at the battle of Muret (1213). Thirty-odd monials lived there and prayed for the salvation of the dead warriors of this necropolis. They can be sepa-

⁹² Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity*, 171, 188–189n48.

⁹³ Hancke, *Femmes en Languedoc*, 294.

rated in three different groups: nuns, converts, and children. The education of the latter was the subject of several of the sixty articles of the monastery's rule, written in 1188, which mention a girls' prioress (*prior puellarum*) and several mistresses who tutored them. Reading was an important component of their training: the rule mentions their books, which were stored away every night in a library by one of the mistresses; it allows children to read out aloud for the nuns, as do the monials, in the refectory or capitular room. The girls took part in some of the liturgical hours and the choir's religious services, where they sometimes had to recite prayers. They do not seem to have had their own dormitory, sharing the nuns' instead: the mistresses' beds were placed in between the girls'. Moderation, admittedly quite relative according to modern standards, was advocated as regarded punishments, for they were not to be beaten with fist or foot, but had their backs whipped during chapters instead.

The mastering of written culture was a substantial asset for Sigena's students, who were often to become queens or countesses, and to help their husbands govern. Such was the case of Constance (d. 1222), daughter of Alfonso II and Sancha. Around the year 1195, she was directly taken from the monastery to Hungary, in a nuptial cortège led by the bishop of Huesca, to marry King Emeric (1182–1204). Her mother had then asked the nuns to comfort her, probably in letters sent to her new place of abode. In 1209, she was to remarry, this time the young Frederick II of Sicily, who was about fifteen years younger than she was, and to whom she may have transmitted part of the culture she acquired in the convent. Eleanor, Constance's elder sister, had been directly presented by Alfonso II to Sigena as an oblate, only to be taken away by her brother Peter II in 1204, who had her marry Raymond VI (1194–1222) of Toulouse, in the process compensating the monastery for the dowry that had been negotiated for her perpetual vows.

Another most interesting testimony is to be found in the chronicles of Bernard Desclot, who tells of another Constance, the daughter of Roger Bernard III (1265–1302), count of Foix, taken away from Sigena by King Peter III. 'She had sojourned there in secular garb ever since the king had entrusted that house with her care and education with the monials' (§132). Indeed, Constance de Foix was then a hostage exchanged for her father, who had been taken prisoner in 1280 during the war for the viscounty of Castellbó. As soon as he was set free, the count joined Philip III's army, on the verge of invading the estate of Peter III, who then had the girl removed from the monastery and kept in a safer place. Thus it was that diplomatic hazards placed Constance of Foix in Sigena. At school there, she

rubbed shoulders with the *infantas* of Barcelona and other girls of Catalan-Aragon noble descent, most of whom were destined to serve the matrimonial strategies of their lineages: Montcada, Cabrera, Entença, Lizana, Urrea, or Castellazuelo...⁹⁴ What these mothers-to-be had in common with many aristocratic girls of their time was indeed a convent education.

Disparate educational levels

What the documents that are available necessarily cannot identify with complete accuracy is how learned these girls were on completion of their studies. At best, we know that, more often than not, it was their mothers who taught them their ABC and that, later on, schoolmasters or nuns would take over the task. How well or how long they were taught, or how well-disposed they were to their studies, were quite personal matters that varied enormously from one to the other. The same went for the wealth or connections that allowed each family to give their children a better or a more mediocre education. Because it was closely dependent on such haphazard criteria, the learning imparted would be dramatically different from one woman to another.

In the late thirteenth century, a debate arose among intellectuals on the question of how educated girls should be. The Dominican scholar Vincent de Beauvais (1184/1194–c. 1264), in his *On the Education of Noble Sons*, which he dedicated between 1247 and 1249 to Queen Margaret of Provence (d. 1295), argued that they should be taught how to read and write and made to study the Bible. Drawing upon the advice Saint Jerome used to give to noble Roman matrons, he considered that such activities would keep them away from vanity, evil thoughts, and carnal temptation (p. 176). This is the classic precept of avoiding laziness, the mother of all vice, through studying. In 1305, Pierre Dubois (c. 1255–1321) wrote for Edward I of England a programmatic book on the Crusade. In particular, he recommended increasing the general educational level of knights in order for them to stand a better chance of winning back the Holy Land. Girls, like boys, would have to learn Latin, logic, one Eastern language, and natural sciences, but mostly medicine and surgery, ‘which shall be made closer to the senses, clearer and easier on account of the fragility of their sex (*propter sexus fragilitatem*)’ (§85). They would thus be able to tend those wounded in the Crusade, but also women in the Holy Land. The author even suggests that their knowledge will bring the schismatics

⁹⁴ Aurell, *Les Noces du comte*, 487–496.

back into Church unity, and the Muslims into Christianity. Pierre Dubois's advice to the king is to marry these pretty nurses to the princes and priests of Oriental Christianity: 'Thanks to their letters, they will teach their children and husbands the articles and sacraments of Roman faith' (§61). It is more risky to apply this matrimonial strategy to Saracen leaders, whose polygamy Pierre goes on to describe: he still believes, however, in the persuasive powers these girls have acquired through education, and that they would eventually manage to convert their Muslim husbands (§69). Both Vincent de Beauvais and Pierre Dubois, albeit for very different reasons—rejection of idleness for the former, the success of the Crusade and the Oriental mission for the latter—insist on the literary, and even on the scientific and medical education of women.

On the other hand, other scholars showed reluctance for the intellectual training of the 'weak sex'. Such was the case, around 1215, with the priest Thomasin von Zerklare, who claimed girls should merely be taught 'courtesy and decency'. He went on to say: 'since she is not destined to rule someday, a well-bred lady should not possess great knowledge; mere common sense becomes her more' (l. 842–849). Around 1270, Giles of Rome could see no point in teaching letters to girls. With the exception of princesses and high nobility daughters, he suggests that it is better instead to keep a close eye on them, teach them restraint in conversation, and keep them busy with needlework (II, II, 20). Around the same time, Philip of Novara was even more radical when he wrote in his *Four Ages of Man*: 'Women should not be taught to read and write, except if they are to become nuns. For many a misfortune has befallen women through reading and writing.' He went on to say that the devil would not fail to take advantage of their natural weakness, making them sin in the letters, songs, or tales they would receive, the contents of which was so reckless it could not be spoken aloud (§25). Further on, he concludes: 'Daughters should never be educated as much as sons' (§31). The misogyny of Philip, a famous lawyer, was in line with legal doctrine which was tending to cut women's prerogatives at a time when Roman law was being rediscovered. It is not, however, to be explained away by his professional practice, since Pierre Dubois, who was also a lawyer, proposed an ambitious study programme for girls. All in all, there is a wide diversity of opinions among authors. The pedagogical choice of whether to educate girls or not does not depend on the clerical or lay status of the proponents. Conservative or more advanced ideas relate to normative discourses whose practical applications medievalists are at a loss to interpret accurately.

Romances and historiographical sources appear a more reliable source than the programmatic utterances of these self-proclaimed pedagogues. On the basis of the former, it is not unreasonable to claim that by and large the nobility, especially its higher strata, did educate its daughters. Literacy was considered useful for personal piety, but also for the government of the Principality or the day-to-day management of the estate to which they might one day be associated through their husbands. It also prepares them to transmit elementary education to their offspring. Undoubtedly, too, it constitutes added value on the matrimonial market. In that respect, because it mixes beauty and manners with erudition, the stereotyped portrait of the young heroines in *chansons de geste* is quite revealing. Such a mix is sometimes to be found in historiography too: Vincent, canon of Prague, in his *Annals* (1140–1167) has learning high on the list of the qualities of Judith of Thuringia, who is praised on the occasion of her wedding with Vladislav II (1140–1172), king of Bohemia. ‘A most noble and honest lady, she was very learned in Latin eloquence, which enhances by far the charm of noble maidens’ (p. 664), he writes. Note the superlatives concerning the bride’s erudition in this text, which unsurprisingly is dedicated to the happy bridegroom.

Beatrice of Burgundy (d. 1184), Emperor Frederick Barbarossa’s second wife since 1156, was considered a cultivated woman in her day. In the over-flattering portrait of her written around 1163 by Acerbo Morena, a devoted supporter of her husband, in the *Lodi Annals*, the beauty of her face, the elegance of her figure, the depth of her wifely love, and her piety are supplemented by another quality: her being *litterata*, or learned in Latin (p. 640). There are, indeed, three hints to back up this claim: first, Empress Beatrice is a bibliophile, for Guillaume de Grenoble mentions the rich psalter she had offered her aunt, Dauphiness Clemence-Margaret. Secondly, according to a sixteenth-century scholar, she is reputed to have composed herself the eight-verse Latin epitaph that was to have been carved on her tombstone.⁹⁵ Last, there survive three *Minnesänger* songs attributed to her son Emperor Henry VI, whom his former preceptor Gaudredo of Viterbo claims to be ‘a prominent erudite in the science of letters [...], a philosopher-king whose majesty does not have to seek others in the running of public affairs’ (p. 21). No doubt the mother was in some degree responsible for her son’s love of letters. The passion for knowledge and poetic talent which Beatrice of Burgundy might have handed down to him cannot but remind us of the songs composed by Richard the Lion-

⁹⁵ Thompson, *The Literacy of the Laity*, 138 and 159n130.

heart, another outstanding Latinist and the son of the patroness of letters, Eleanor of Aquitaine.

Like ladies from princely houses, some women from the lesser nobility received a higher education. A not hyperbolic—and probably factually accurate—remark is found in the *Universal Chronicle* of the Franciscan Albert of Stade (d. 1265), when he calls up the formidable figure of Hildegard of Bingen, whose vast and profound works, directly inspired by the Holy Spirit, appear to him in sharp contrast with her rudimentary education. ‘She had learned nothing but the Psalter, as is customary with noble maidens’ (p. 330). The aristocracy, more particularly its upper layers, and the urban gentry did ensure that their daughters were at least a little literate. Even though few of them might have rivalled the culture of clerics who had been to cathedral schools and universities, almost all of them learned to read and write, and also picked up rudiments of Latin.

Women readers

In art and literature, the figure of the noblewoman is often associated with the book. She carries one closed in her hand, or reads from one in her lap. An open book on a lectern in the ladies’ chamber belongs to her intimate universe, where the written words are a vehicle for prayer, poetry, and reverie. *Belle Doette* is a famous late twelfth-century spinning song, whose purpose was to rhyme up sewing and weaving feminine routines. It tells of the nostalgia of the deserted maid who sits by her window, ‘reading a book, albeit half-heartedly, for she remembers her friend Doon, abroad on tournaments’ (l. 1–4). The design she is holding, and the reading she struggles to keep her mind on, are familiar both to the singer and the female hearers of the song. Fiction thus echoes a gesture that is characteristic of noblewomen, a class *Doette* obviously belongs to, since tournaments at that time were only open to aristocratic knights. Yet another lone and silent female reader appears in *Durmat le Gallois* (c. 1250), a romance from Picardy: whoever beholds her in such a pose is sure to fall in love instantly, it is suggested (l. 235–236). What the anonymous writer has in mind is the attraction that the reading woman exerts on upper class men.

Other romances have a lady reading out aloud to an enraptured audience, thus transporting them to dream-like worlds. *The Knight with Two Swords* (1200–1230) portrays the daughter of the Lord of Port’s daughter, aged seventeen and incredibly beautiful, who reads out to her mother and

father a romance on the Trojan War (l. 4276–4277). It mentions also Guinevere, whereby she recites a text for the ‘knights and maidens’ in her retinue (l. 8956–8957). The former episode draws upon Yvain’s visit to the Castle of Pire Adventure as recounted by Chrétien de Troyes in the *Knight with the Lion* (1176–1181), where a young maid reads her parents an unknown romance: ‘Had he beheld her, the God of Love would have incarnated himself to serve her’ (l. 5379–5382). In such a context, the erotic motif becomes closely entwined with the female’s reading. The maid with the book is seductive because of her Venus-hood, her elegance and manner. An epitome of all qualities, she will foster admiration, or even passionate love, in the romance’s male hero.

In such a context, passion is inextricably entwined with feminine reading. In Robert de Blois’s romance, Floris and Lyriope give themselves to each other after the two of them, on a fine May morning under an olive-tree, have read a short story by Ovid about the tragic love of Pyramus and Thisbe (l. 955–1048). The story starts as badly as for the two young people in the *Metamorphoses*, since Floris, a low nobleman, had to borrow his twin sister’s dress in order to approach Lyriope, a duke’s daughter, in disguise. But it ends well: after being briefly exiled at the court of King Arthur, Floris will eventually marry his true love and assume the paternity of the child born of their erudite union, and whose mother the faithful—or accomplice—twin sister had all that time pretended to be. In contrast, Dante consigns Francesca da Rimini and her brother-in-law to Hell for a similar love, which originates in a comparable reading of Lancelot and Guinevere’s first kiss. In both stories, the literary process is very close to triple *mise en abyme*: the fictional characters perform the very actions that are described in the romance they are reading, and the hearer or reader discovers that he or she is reading or listening to a reading. These scenes can only lend a high value to women’s book culture. But are we merely dealing with a literary game of mirrors? Does the fictional woman reader in romances have a flesh-and-bone counterpart in the twelfth- and thirteenth-century aristocracy?

The indispensable psalter

From the thirteenth century onwards—in a turn that represents a far cry from romance love scenes—the iconography representing aristocratic women in the process of reading was becoming religious in nature. The first work of art on that theme seems to be a recumbent tomb figure sculpted c. 1200: the tufa effigy of Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204), hold-

ing an open book on her chest. She is lying next to other royal figures in the abbey church of Fontevraud (Anjou), to where Eleanor had retired. A few decades on, among the twelve upright statues of the western choir of Naumburg Cathedral (Saxony) stand the countesses Gepa and Gerburg, holding their psalters, one open, the other closed. Lastly, a number of illuminations on the first folios of a woman's prayer book show its owner holding the selfsame book in her hands. The oldest of these miniatures seems to be the one that appears in a manuscript produced in Amiens between 1280 and 1299 for Yolande de Nesle, viscountess of Soissons, which portrays her with her book kneeling and praying to the Holy Virgin before a lectern on which her book lies.⁹⁶ Ladies' devotional books are commonly classified by medievalists, albeit arbitrarily, into three categories: evangelistaries (collections of Gospel excerpts), psalters (containing psalms, but also calendars and liturgical prayers, and sometimes passages from the Bible or from lives of saints), and hour-books (compiled for laypersons from the 1300's onwards, and including not only psalter texts but also the four major prayer cycles: the hours of the Virgin, of the Holy Cross, of the Holy Spirit and the Office for the Dead).⁹⁷ At the end of the Middle Ages, the progress of the iconographic theme of the woman reader coincided with the increased diffusion of reading throughout the nobility and urban gentry, and with the sharp increase in manuscript production.

Young girls from well-to-do families would possess their own psalters. The *Life of Ida of Nivelles*, written shortly after her death by the Cistercian Goswin de Bossut, chanter of the Flemish de Villers monastery, provides an interesting detail: Ida, born in the Nivelles bourgeoisie, came under strong family pressure to marry one of their fellow townsmen. She, however, had firmly set her mind to become a Beguine. 'She fled out of the window, taking with her nothing but her psalter, a book she had only just started studying from, and the plain dress she was wearing' (I, e). Another such anecdote is to be found in the anonymous *Life of Christina of Markyate* (1095/1100–1155), a saint from Cambridgeshire who also ran away from home and a forced marriage in order to abide by her vow of celibacy. While in hiding, she fought the devil 'by reading and singing psalms day and night' (p. 98). Between 1120 and 1140, by then a famous hermit, she was given another psalter by the monks of Saint Albans, a much richer, superbly illuminated book, today preserved in the Hildesheim ca-

⁹⁶ Clanchy, 'Images of Ladies with Prayer Books'; Bell, 'Medieval Women Book Owners'.

⁹⁷ Lobrichon, *La Religion des laïcs*, 193.

thedral library. According to their hagiographers, neither of these two girls could do without her prayer book, which contained the psalms and orations in use throughout the Christian world. The book was not only useful for their piety but also as a textbook for the learning of Latin.

The reciting of psalms was a routine activity for older aristocratic women. Matthew Paris claims in his *Chronica Majora* that it saved King Henry III of England from murder in his palace at Woodstock. At midnight, a madman with a knife sneaked in through his bedroom window, but 'Divine Providence had it that the king happened to be sleeping with the Queen that night'. The deranged man then started looking for him everywhere, when Margaret Biset, one of the Queen's chambermaids, spotted him and gave the alarm. The reason why Margaret was not yet in bed was that she 'was staying up late and chanting psalms by candlelight' (t. 3, p. 497). A pious woman, she had refused marriage to lead a religious life, and eventually was to found a convent despite the hostility of her parents, who must have frowned upon the amount of alms she dispensed (t. 4, p. 200). Matthew Paris, a monk who was always keen to draw lessons from recent history, makes her into an example of piety and generosity for his female readers.

The *Life of Dauphiness Clemence-Margaret of Burgundy* (d. 1163) was written shortly after her death by Guillaume, canon of Grenoble, who had most probably met her in person. Clemence-Margaret, the daughter of Stephen I, count of Varais, and niece of Pope Calixtus II (1119–1124), married Guigues-Dauphin IV (1133–1142), count of Viennois. In the twenty years of her widowhood, she ruled over Dauphiné. Her almost hagiographic *Life* extols her piety, moral rectitude, austerity, and generosity to the Church, as well as the way she pacified her county and died a good death. The way she prayed was equally exemplary for the wives and widows who were to hear her life story: 'She could read the psalms and several orations she had in writing. Every day she would reread them with eyes and mind as she fervently prayed, whether it be at church or in her room. Moreover, she would always have someone at her side carry a precious psalter adorned with gilded letters that the Empress [Beatrice of Burgundy, d. 1184], her niece, had sent over to her' (§7). So dear to her heart were those books that she read them again on her deathbed. 'As she felt her end approaching, she bade her daughter adieu and asked her to bring her all her prayers and divine writings. After reading them from cover to cover with all her heart, she would not speak to anyone, according to eyewitnesses. Only an hour later, she crossed herself on the forehead and lips and simply passed away' (§18). Thus, until death, reading is

part and parcel of the countess's praying. Her spirituality is undeniably bookish in nature.

In the collective imaginary of the times, the devotion book appears as one of the chief attributes of the noblewoman's religiousness. It is a quasi-sacred, highly valued object. In the Middle Ages, an idea started to spread: on the day of Annunciation, the Holy Virgin was reading and meditating the messianic passages in the Scriptures—rather than spinning, as the Apocryphal gospels had her doing. This theme, first encountered in the fourth century in the writings of Ambrosius of Milan and subsequently in apocryphal texts attributed to him, came to enjoy considerable success from the ninth century onwards. Theologians thereafter were to endow Mary with an astounding erudition, a case in point being Albert the Great, who claims her to have perfectly mastered the seven liberal arts. The iconography of the late Middle Ages popularized at least her reading abilities, for at that time, any painted representation of the Annunciation made a point of showing the book she is reading or had just read as food for meditation.⁹⁸ In a letter from Abelard to Heloise just after she took the veil, reading symbolizes the superiority of the spirituality and high culture of those imitators of Mary, the nuns. Indeed, the letter's rhetoric sets them in sharp contrast with marital life and the chores of maternity, which he associates with Eve, the Holy Virgin's antithesis. 'What a shame it would be if your blessed hands, now turning the pages of divine volumes, had to be enslaved to those debasing labours that are women's lot!' (ep. V, 32c), he writes.

Religious books preserved from the medieval period which belonged to women are numerous. The Bodleian Library in Oxford keeps the Gospels used by Margaret (c. 1046–1093), daughter of Edward the Exile (d. 1057), pretender to the throne of England, and wife of Malcolm III (1058–1093), king of Scotland. The queen is better known as Saint Margaret of Scotland, even though it was only in 1250 that she was canonized, more than a century and a half after she died. She would have been able to hold the book easily in her hand, carry it around, and look it up without using a lectern on account of its dimensions: it is only 173 mm x 110 mm and is thirty-eight folios in length. It contains excerpts from and pericopes of the four Gospels, mostly dealing with the Passion, and classified according to each one's internal order rather than, as is the case for evangelistaries and lectionaries, according to the chronological order of the liturgical calendar. At the beginning of each gospel is a miniature of Matthew, Mark,

⁹⁸ Green, *Women Readers*, 120–121, Sheingorn, 'The Wise Mother', 69, 79.

Luke, and John respectively, either reading or writing. The book had been fashioned in England between 1030 and 1070. At the end of the eleventh century, a Latin poem was, however, added in the first folio, which told the story of its miraculous preservation. A priest who was carrying it in one fold of his tunic, for oaths to be taken on it, lost it in a river as he was crossing it. Only much later did a knight find it and fish it out of the water, and it was undamaged but for the last two folios, the damp stains on which bore witness to the event's truthfulness.⁹⁹

The anecdote of the book saved unharmed from the waters is also found in the *Life of Margaret*, written between 1104 and 1107. In this hagiographical narrative, it is described as her 'book of Gospels', 'decorated with painted images of the four Evangelists' and with 'gilded initials' (III, 25), which identifies it unambiguously as the Bodleian manuscript. The author of the *Life* is known only by the initial T in the manuscripts, but is believed to be the monk Turgot (d. 1115), the queen's confessor, who was prior of Saint Peter in Durham at the time of writing, then bishop of Saint Andrews from 1109 onwards. He had been commissioned by Margaret's daughter, Edith-Mathilda of Scotland, who was both Queen of England and a bibliophile who had herself received advanced literary education from her mother and the Wilton and Romsey monastic schools.

A frequent theme in medieval hagiography, the miracle of the immersed book stands in sharp contrast with the rest of *Life of Margaret*, which is otherwise devoid of supernatural events, miraculous cures, or other wonders. Indeed, Turgot made a point of writing a realistic narrative: 'Let people marvel at other saints' miracles! What I admire most in Margaret were her deeds of mercy' (III, §24). By telling the anecdote, Turgot to a degree breaks the rule he had set for himself, and thus he endows the book with incontrovertible sacredness. One of the messages he means to convey for the benefit of aristocratic ladies is that her pious reading was a habit of the queen's most worthy of imitation. 'She would always organize her and her family's existence by the wise rule of Holy Scripture. Despite the hurly-burly of litigation and royalty's numerous chores, she would indulge with admirable care in divine reading, often conferring on the subtlest of religious issues with the scholars around her.' Turgot at once goes on to say that, as a result of her 'sainted greed for sacred books', she would take advantage of his friendship and beg him to procure new ones (II, §10). All in all, the *lectio* which Margaret practiced since she was a child (I, §6) is a key ingredient in her spirituality. Being

⁹⁹ Gameson, 'The Gospels of Margaret'; Rushforth, *Saint Margaret's Gospel*.

both meditation and recitation, it helps her remain in contact with God in spite of the demands of court life and her many worldly tasks. It provides a moral framework for her existence, and ultimately an initiation into theology, which she studies with the help of the priests in her entourage.

Turgot praises Margaret's positive influence over her husband, whom he describes as fascinated by her library. 'Even though he did not know letters, the king was in the habit of handling and examining the books she prayed from or read. Should she mention one to him that was dearest to her heart, he would hug it and kiss it again and again. He would then have a goldsmith gild that book and embed it with jewels, and then bring it back to her as a token of devotion' (II, §11). This most hagiographical passage highlights the queen's benevolent influence on her husband, making her a model to be imitated by her female readers. Margaret succeeds in arousing in him the same veneration for holy books as she herself feels. Turgot depicts Malcolm III as a rough, coarse, and illiterate warrior, yet loving and benevolent to her. He has the saintly woman giving her husband detailed advice, and thus substantially improving the government, society, and church of her adopted kingdom. Like her, the author is of Anglo-Saxon stock, and indeed most likely the very first of his nation to have held a Scottish episcopal seat, thanks partly to the support of the new Norman kings of England. Therefore, he unhesitatingly plays up his fellow-countrywoman's civilizing contribution to Scotland, even if this means, by contrast, amplifying the 'barbaric' traits of the king, whose alleged illiteracy and crude, inane admiration for writing Turgot exaggerates.

Psalters were expensive and valuable. In the eleventh century, they were extremely costly and it was still difficult to commission a copy, so they tended to be handed down within families, mostly from mother to daughter. Orderic Vitalis relates how Robert II de Grandmesnil (d. 1089), a learned knight and a nephew of the man who restored the monastery of Saint Evroult, joined the said monastery after his father died a violent death under his very eyes. He became a monk and inherited quite a lot of land from his mother Hawise's dowry, along with a large illuminated psalter which had once belonged to Emma of Normandy (d. 1052), Queen of England, and been handed down in the family (t. 2, p. 42). Similar situations are to be found in more modest families. In its section on inheritance law, the *Mirror of the Saxons*, a collection of customary laws compiled by the jurist Eike von Repgow, draws up the list of what paraphernalia distinct from the dowry wives were entitled to hand down to their daughters in their will: clothing, bedding, poultry, kitchen utensils... and 'all books

pertaining to religious practice'. In 1279, a new article was in, specifying in regard to the latter that they are 'usually for women to read' (pp. 130–131), making it logical that devotional books should be included in the feminine paraphernalia.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, psalm-books appear to be more widespread among women than were the Gospels. We should remember that they were being superseded little by little by hour-books, which arranged the recitation of these canticles of praise and other orations in cycles according to the time of day and the liturgical calendar. One of the earliest psalters for laywomen preserves dates back to the 1150's (Baltimore, Walters Art Gallery, ms W.10). It is believed to have belonged to Clemence of Zähringen (d. 1167), heiress to the duchy of Swabia and the first wife of Henry the Lion (1142–1195), duke of Saxony and Bavaria. Her portrait appears on a full folio at the beginning of this short (126-page) book, a mere 11 cm high and 7 cm wide, small enough to be held in one hand. In spite of Clemence's high rank, the size is comparable to that of more modest psalters for everyday use, which were then growing more and more popular among women.¹⁰⁰ The anonymous *Life* of the Irish hermit Marianus Scotus (d. 1088), who became the founder and abbot of Saint Peter of Ratisbon, praises his self-abnegation in that he spent his days and nights copying books of such kind. 'He copied a lot of small books (*libelli*) and manual psalters (*manualia psalteria*) for needy widows and poor clerics in Ratisbon, for the salvation of his soul and without seeking any earthly reward' (§9). Few of those books, whose parchment, ink, and binding were quite crude, have survived to this day.

The books used every day by the lower nobility must have numbered in the thousands at the end of the Middle Ages. These are but the upper part of an iceberg whose prestigious tip, made up of superb Bibles, psalters, and hour-books, large-sized and decorated with beautiful polychrome lettering and artistic illuminations, has alone stood the test of time. Quite obviously, the privileged recipients of these costly works included queens among their number. One of the most beautiful of these psalters was completed around 1213 in the north of France for Ingeborg of Denmark (d. 1236), the wife of Philip II Augustus of France (Chantilly, Condé museum, ms 1695).

To date, the earliest books preserved which served the needs of noblewomen—other than queens—date back to the mid-thirteenth century. Examples include the psalter fashioned in Arras between 1243 and 1246

¹⁰⁰ Clanchy, 'Images of Ladies with Prayer Books', 107.

for Guiluys de Boisleux and her husband Jean de Neuville-Vitasse, a kinsman of the Courtenays, Latin emperors of Byzantium (New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, ms 730); the Cuerden psalter, written and illuminated in Oxford c. 1270 for an unknown commissioner (*ibid.*, ms 756); or the psalter of the countess of Leicester, dating from the 1300's (Oxford, Bodleian Library, ms Douce 231). Miniatures sometimes fill up almost all the book, to the detriment of text, as in the *Picture-Book of Madame Marie*, which mostly contains painted scenes of Christ's life. The book was most likely made in Hainaut between 1285 and 1300 for Marie de Rethel (d. 1315), dowager-countess of Brienne (National Library of France, Nouv. acq. fr., ms 16251). The prohibitive cost of such books, which would have been produced by a team of copyists, illuminators, and bookbinders, made them affordable only to a royal or princely elite, who would display them on lecterns in the busiest rooms of their palaces. These luxurious manuscripts were there for the general gaze, and not really meant for private, everyday prayer, for which a plainer book was deemed sufficient.

Romances in the vernacular show psalters in more profane contexts than does Latin hagiography. In Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight with the Lion*, Laudine pathetically bewails her husband, who has just been killed. 'She alone remains behind, often clutching at her throat, wringing her hands, and beating her palms, as she reads her psalms in her gilt lettered psalter' (l. 1411–1417). Thanks to his ring of invisibility, Yvain, the husband's murderer, is able to observe her in this state, and falls madly in love with her. Laudine, now a widow, soon lets herself be comforted and yields to him, marrying him forthwith. With much humour and sense of paradox, Chretien deliberately contrasts the pathos of the mourning scene and the merriness of the ensuing wedding. The reading of psalms in a superbly illuminated book, most fitting for Laudine's condition, nevertheless appears as the only placatory act in the midst of her frantic, suicidal behaviour. As a token of piety, it seems to be spared the clerk writer's irony. In his *Parzival*, Wolfram von Eschenbach associates the psalter with the reckoning of time. The hermit Treurizent tells Perceval, his nephew, that four years and a half and three days have gone by since his last visit, which he proves by means of his prayer book (§460, l. 22–27). The calendars that complement the various psalms and orations, to be recited on liturgical fixed and movable feasts, are valuable chronological markers.

Women's understanding of the canticles and prayers in the psalter they were reading was sometimes poor. They repeated them so many times that they eventually knew them by heart, like Aleth, Bernard of Clairvaux's

mother, whom the Cistercian hagiographer Guillaume de Saint-Thierry (c. 1085–1148/1149) claims passed away singing the psalms on her deathbed, with the clerks around her, till her strength eventually faltered: ‘Even as her voice had grown hardly audible, her lips and tongue kept on moving’ (II, §5). At the same period, Guibert de Nogent described his mother as ‘illiterate’ (I, 19) and related how she could recite by heart the seven penitential psalms, ‘which she had learned from an elderly woman, more by ear than by reading’ (I, 14). Guibert’s mother, being unable to read, let alone understand, Latin, must have grasped their meaning only superficially. Another most reproachful testimony on women’s comprehension of the Davidic hymns is to be found in Salimbene of Adam’s *Chronicle*. The Franciscan, an admirer of Hugues de Digne (1205–1257), a minister of his own order in Provence, relates a debate in which he defeated the Dominican Peter of Puglia, who criticized overly superficially the eschatological work of the Cistercian Joachim of Flora (1130–1202). Hugues then retorts: ‘I believe you have read Joachim as a woman reads her psalter. When she gets to the end, she does not even remember what she read at the beginning’ (p. 361). The controversy thus conjures up the misogynous cliché of uneducated women routinely and casually parroting psalms they hardly understand. The use of such a comparison nevertheless sheds light on how much the reading of devotion books had spread among ladies.

Receiving love poems and letters

It was not only Scriptures, psalters, and other Latin prayer collections that women read. According to the envoi with which two troubadours and trouvères end their vernacular love poems, the recipient is sometimes supposed to read them herself. ‘I, Gontier [de Soignies], who have arranged these words and put them down in writing, would be blessed should this message be swiftly conveyed to my lady and should she read it’ (IV, l. 61–64). This trouvère from Hainaut wrote around 1200. A native of Limousin, Bernard de Ventadour portrays himself as a diffident lover who dared not step close to his dearest. Writing will help fight his self-consciousness: ‘She knows letters and understands them; I enjoy writing words; should they be pleasing to her, let her read them for my sake’ (XL, l. 53–56). These two songs mention silent and intimate reading by the loved woman, who discovers a love note in seclusion.

The theme of women in love complacently reading their lovers’ letters sometimes crops up in literature. Romance writers are never clear as to what language such letters might have been composed in, but the vernacu-

lar would seem to be suggested by the context. If these damsels did receive a love note, they could then silently relish its words in the privacy of their chambers.¹⁰¹ Letters whose contents are more political and public than affective and private are also mentioned in romances. The fate of the letter Gawain wrote on parchment in his own hand for Arthur to come and rescue him (§625, l. 12–15) is described at great length in Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Parzival*. His messenger begins by looking for Guinevere and finds her 'kneeling in her chapel, reading her psalter' (§644, l. 22–23). He too kneels before her and hands the letter over to her. Before he could even pronounce Gawain's name, the queen recognizes his handwriting and starts weeping for joy, as she has not heard from him at all for the past five years. She questions the envoy, who summarizes the contents of the message, adding that she will know more after reading it. Guinevere then begs him to pretend he has just come galloping in to court and then to ask to see urgently the king. By this ruse he succeeds in seeing Arthur and handing him the letter. The king reads it and enquires about the fate of his nephew Gawain, to which the messenger replies that he will provide further details if he can count on his royal support. Lastly, Arthur asks him to take the letter to Guinevere, who discloses the contents to her feminine retinue: 'Crystal tears were flowing as her sweet lips read so clearly the written words and Gawain's call for help' (650, l. 23–26). All these women will then beguile the knights into travelling the land and helping the king's nephew. The romance is significant in several ways: Guinevere's familiarity with her nephew's handwriting, her dialogue with the messenger about the letter's content, the careful staging of the envoy's arrival before an audience that craves for news, the stirring public reading by the queen. The letter sets up a genuine curial sociability, discretely ruled by the queen herself.

Reality indeed was not too far removed from fiction. Twelfth-century epistolary collections contain numerous letters addressed to women. Let us just take as example the short undated message sent by Hildegard of Bingen—appropriately in Latin, which bridges the yawning gap between Romance and Germanic languages—to Queen Eleanor of Aquitaine (d. 1204): 'Your spirit is like a storm-beaten wall. You look around you and cannot find rest. Be quiet, hold on, rest on God and on your loved ones. God will help you in your tribulation. May He bless you and help you in your affliction!' (ep. 318). The nun recommends serenity and resignation to the Queen of England—maybe around the year 1173 as she is rebelling

¹⁰¹ Some examples from German literature in Green, *Women Readers*, 127–128, 182.

against her husband who had forcefully imprisoned her for a long time. In view of its general content and its author's prestige, the letter was publicized and widely used for the edification of the faithful, who might have lost their inner peace and forgotten eternal truths because of secular preoccupations.

Another notable, albeit much more secret letter is one written in 1150—in Latin like the former one—by Pere Berenguer, sacristan of Vic cathedral (Catalonia), to Guilhema of Melgueil, viscountess of Cardona, and to the abbey of the house of canons founded in their village at an earlier date, and fortified by the viscounts. Its purpose is to keep them informed of the hostile matrimonial strategies secretly fomented by the neighbouring and rival Montcada lineage. After the formal salutation, Pere Berenguer mentions the precautions imposed by the seriousness of the matter: 'First and foremost, I must ask of you that as soon as this letter is read and reread, its words should be kept secret and the parchment be burnt' (p. 317). The fact that the message had two recipients raises the issue of the cultural mediator role that the abbot might have played in translating and explaining the letter to the viscountess. But it is Guilhema's name that comes first, and nothing could have prevented a widow of such rank, with a solid education, from receiving it before the abbot did and from reading and understanding its contents on her own. This silent reading, however, seems to have been exceptional in connection with political or patrimonial matters, as the carrier often reads out the message's content to the recipient, emphasizing the finer points which authors wish to leave no written traces of.

One last epistolary example raises the question of how variable the level of literacy could be inside the aristocracy. In 1256, the Dominican inquisitors Jean de Saint-Pierre and Reginald de Chartres, while inquiring in the Lauraguais, drew up the minutes of a witness's testimony. The man was a messenger who claimed to have delivered a letter from a Cathar deacon to Blanca, the wife of Guilhem de Latour, a modest knight from the village of Montauriol. Unfortunately, nothing is said about the language of this letter, but the recipient's reaction seems to suggest Latin rather than Occitan. Indeed, in the witness's own words, 'Blanca, who had no one to read it for her [...], asked him to carry it to Mirota, wife of Giraud, which he did, but Mirota refused to take it because it was not addressed to her' (p. 20). Mirota was from the Unaut de Lanta family, one of the most prominent in the area, while Blanca was the wife of one of the numerous co-lords of Montauriol. The former can read, or at least understands Latin, the latter does not. Social differences were paramount in the

spread of literacy. In this Languedoc village, cultural abilities are in line with the internal hierarchy of the noblewomen.

A few particularly well-educated women could not only read Latin but understand it when it was spoken among clerics. In his *Fragments on the life and miracles of Bernard of Clairvaux*, the Cistercian Geoffrey of Auxerre (1115/20–c. 1188), a fellow companion of the saint, relates a most enlightening anecdote. Adelaide (d. 1158), wife of Simon I (1115–1139), duke of Lorraine, welcomes Bernard with her husband, and both are passionately urged to pacify their principality. It so turns out that a sleeve of the Cistercian abbot's accidentally touches the duchess's coat. One of the witnesses, presumably a cleric, tells him ironically: 'Father, it's a most religious woman you are touching!' To which Bernard replies: 'Not for the moment, for her time has not yet come...' These words trouble the duchess, who subsequently converts, later to join the Cistercian order at Tart monastery in Burgundy (§ 39). Geoffrey goes on to say that the reason why she had been able to understand Bernard's remark about her was that 'she knew letters', meaning the conversational Latin used by the two clerics. Scholars are not at all in agreement about Adelaide's family origin, but what is certain is that her milieu was at that time German-speaking, which makes her command of Latin all the more remarkable. It had helped her catch a sentence in two clerics' private conversation, a crucial factor for her subsequent vocation.

The level of understanding of Latin differs among women of the aristocracy. Several twelfth-century authors praise the knowledge of Latin of particular women, which they deem exceptional in their day and age. It is always tricky for the historian to distinguish in these apologies between panegyrics, which are almost always rhetorical and conventional, and informed and well-measured first-hand testimonies. At any rate, literacy is quite widespread among feminine nobility.

Women writers

In his *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136–1137), Geoffrey of Monmouth, a supporter of Empress Matilda's (d. 1167) accession to the throne during the English civil war, unhesitatingly extols the virtues of the land's ancient queens. As they have wisely and prudently ruled the island, the Empress will do likewise, he opines. He briefly mentions Marcia, reputed to have reigned around 365, who was 'learned in all sciences' and had drawn up a law that the Britons named after her (§ 47). The interpretation

of this short passage by Wace in his French *Romance of Brut* is even more laudatory: 'Marcia was a most accomplished learned and scholarly lady of the highest repute. She put all her spirit and effort in learning to read and write. So much did she study that she knew many a thing. She devised and wrote a law they call Marcian in the Breton language' (3336–3344). Only Geoffrey of Monmouth's imagination, and his taste for folk etymology, could have attributed the 'Mercian law' to a queen. Wace, in his 'translation' of the passage, backs him up and embellishes the lady's portrait with favourable elements in the same courtly tone he gives to the whole of his *Romance of Brut*. Any elementary history of law would no doubt have shattered his dreams, as no medieval law was ever drawn up by a woman. However, there exist numerous testimonies to ladies mastering other forms of writing.

Women epistolarians

Noblewomen, just like the males around them, were accustomed to maintain correspondences. More often than not, they would dictate their letters to a clerk who would transpose them into good Latin, either putting them down on parchment himself or more often getting a scribe to write up his notes. This collaboration is reflected in the three letters (c. 1192) in which Eleanor of Aquitaine, angrily calling herself 'By the Wrath of God, Queen of the English', or 'Most unhappy, even wretched, Queen of the English', demands of the pope the liberation of her son, Richard the Lionheart, held captive by the Emperor. It was Peter of Blois, one of the more gifted writers of letters of the time, who wrote them on behalf of the Queen, whose motherly agony he sets forth in a most pathetic way. 'Give me back my son!' he has her saying, amidst other requests, reproaches and hyperboles fit to articulate a mother's despair (ep. 144–146).¹⁰² An equally striking tone is to be found in a document that, admittedly, does not directly belong to the epistolary genre: the statement drawn up for Marie de Montpellier (d. 1213), nullifying a coerced Act. She inveighs against her husband Peter II of Aragon, who had harassed her into consenting to a donation *inter vivos* which resulted in making him the unique and irrevocable lord of Montpellier. 'Never did I accept to approve or confirm those conventions that do me great wrong. Therefore, I was disgracefully threatened by the king, my husband: I was crucified!' Even her friends and relations, she goes on to say, cowed as they were by Peter's violence, had aban-

¹⁰² Türk, 'Un royaume sans roi: Pierre de Blois et Aliénor d'Aquitaine'.

doned her. 'They told me they could not give me any advice, for I was under the yoke of the king, who could act as he wished.' To cut a long story short, the donation, which Marie had been 'forced' and 'compelled and coerced' into approving, was declared null and void.¹⁰³ Even though they had been put into words by clerks, Eleanor's and Marie's statements do reveal an indisputable feminine sensitivity. The motherly anguish, the agony of conjugal violence expressed have a poignant effect on readers' sensibilities, forcing empathy with the victims.

The same poignancy is to be found in the three long letters Heloise wrote to Peter Abelard. The artful expression of feeling is paralleled by virtuosity in implementing the rules of the epistolary genre. Rhetorical brilliancy, mastery of the Latin *cursus* that lends rhythm to the prose, and classical culture appear to be second nature for Heloise, who casually quotes Ovid, Horace, Cicero, Seneca, and Lucian as well as the Church Fathers. Moreover, she has smatterings of Greek and Hebrew, and has mastered the sciences of the *quadrivium*. Her culture, outstanding for those days, was praised by her husband Peter Abelard, albeit somewhat cryptically: 'The sheer magnitude of her excellent knowledge of letters exceeded her beauty, which, however, was not small' (ep. I, 4b). A more interesting judgement is that of Peter the Venerable (1122–1156), abbot of Cluny, who comments on her knowledge, which he deems mind-boggling for a laywoman: 'Before she detached herself from the world's concerns, she would devote herself entirely to the study of literature and secular knowledge' (ep. 115). This young patrician girl's passion for knowledge and her exceptional intelligence did indeed impress her contemporaries.

Heloise's biography is still a subject of dispute, as are her origins and the exact nature of her tumultuous relations with Peter Abelard. She was born in the 1090's, perhaps the illegitimate daughter of Gilbert de Garlande, bottler to king Louis VII, from noble stock of the Île-de-France. As a child, she seems to have spent time at the Argenteuil convent, benefiting from the nuns teaching. It was after her stay there that she came to the home of her uncle Fulbert, canon of Notre-Dame of Paris, who entrusted her education to Peter Abelard, whom she was to marry secretly around 1115, bearing him a child, Astrolabe. It was in 1118 that Abelard placed his wife in the monastery of Argenteuil. Fulbert and his people, incensed by the decision, castrated him. The pair then separated, each taking the religious habit on the very same day. Heloise subsequently became prioress of Argenteuil, and later abbess of Paraclet (Champagne). It was her

¹⁰³ Aurell, *Les Noces du comte*, 434–435.

husband who, at her bidding, drew up the convent's rule, which laid major emphasis on the reading of the Bible and patristic texts, and commentary and meditation on them. Heloise died in 1164.¹⁰⁴

Excerpts from a hundred and sixteen love letters in Latin exchanged in the early twelfth century between a philosopher and his female disciple were copied at Clairvaux in 1471–1472. Several critics have attributed these to Heloise and Abelard, but there is no consensus on this.¹⁰⁵ Whatever the truth on who may have composed the collection, Abelard himself, in *The History of my Calamities*, does specify that thinking the epistolary exchanges to come with Heloise had been instrumental in fostering his passion for her. He also mentions the letter she had written to him when she learned she was pregnant (I, 4b, 5c). The three long letters that are indisputably Heloise's, however, were not written when she was still a secular. They were written around 1132, when she was already abbess of Paraclet. In the first, she asks Abelard to apply himself more in that monastery, which he was the founder of. Because of their past common life, he should advise her more. The second one is a reproach against Abelard's non-committal reply: Heloise claims that she still loves him, and fears for her own salvation on account of this feeling, which the morals of intention professed by her husband causes her to mistake for a sinful act. This time around, Abelard's answer was more personal, as he mentions his formerly carnal, and now spiritual, love for her. In her last letter, his wife then puts aside her feelings and asks him for a historical account of feminine monasticism, and to draw up the rules of her convent. All three letters show perfect mastery of the literary genre, a wide Latin culture, and great subtlety in the description of feelings made complex and contradictory by such a cruel, unprecedented situation. Heloise had been a nun for about fifteen years by then, and therefore at leisure to improve herself in terms of culture. But the fact remains that the bulk of it had been acquired before she took the veil. It is the Argenteuil monastic school (granted she did attend it), and most of all the education she received at her uncle's that explain her vast knowledge.

The milieu of the canons entertained very close links with the cathedral schools. Its members and their relatives must have benefited from this. Just as canon Fulbert educated his ward Heloise, his contemporary

¹⁰⁴ Lobrichon, *Héloïse*, 99–104, 118–125, 142–156, 308–311.

¹⁰⁵ Two recent discussions, pro: Piron, 'Présentation' and 'Enquête sur un texte', in his transl. *Lettres des deux amants*, 8–15, 175–218; con: Tilliette, 'Introduction' to his ed. of *Lettres d'Abélard*, 13–14.

Laurent, archdeacon of Poitiers, kept a close watch on the intellectual progress of his niece Adelaide. Around 1163, Peter of Blois deemed the young maiden 'most learned in Latin', *plurima litterata* (ep. 54). He wrote to her uncle because he had learned that the latter meant to make her a nun, even though she would have preferred to get married. Citing the book of Genesis, Peter explains that coercion cannot possibly be legitimate for such a life choice. However, proud as he is of his own persuasive skills, he sets out to convince her himself to freely follow the monastic calling. 'Since she is most learned in Latin, I shall endeavour to win her over by writing and speaking, so that I can test with her the power, second only to the Grace of God, of human eloquence.' To judge by a later letter, addressed by Peter to Adelaide, his persuasive skills did indeed prevail, for he congratulates her on her entering a convent (ep. 55). Neither letter mentions her studies as crucial in the girl's monastic vocation. Her literary inclinations are, instead, supposed to open her mind to the arguments put forth by the letter's author, who is so proud of his own persuasive powers. They allow Adelaide to enter a scholastic *disputatio* of sorts with a clerk, who by no means questions the right of a gifted and educated young woman to take a part in it.

In twelfth- and thirteenth-century Arthurian literature, women sometimes write their love letters themselves. Such is the case of Iseult in her correspondence with Tristan. The earliest romances that have the Cornwall lovers writing to each other, however, are no older than 1210. In works from the second half of the twelfth century, they merely communicate by signs from a distance, e.g. the chips thrown into the river to define their rendezvous. The oldest known version of *Tristan*, made famous through Eilhart von Oberg's German translation, features Pilorse, the messenger who conveys long discourses from both lovers. Manuscripts make him either a 'courtesan' (*Gesell*, l. 7366) or more simply a 'foot courier' (*Garzin*, *ibid.* ms D): the former solution seems to better befit the nature of a character who is a spokesman, confidant, or go-between rather than simply mailman. Again between 1150 and 1200, the 4,500-odd surviving Anglo-Norman octosyllabic verses of Beroul's *Tristan* do mention two letters. However, it is not the two lovers, but King Mark and his rival who write them. The first one is written 'with quill, ink, and parchment' on behalf of Tristan by the hermit Ogrin, who seals it with a signet ring (l. 2428–32). On delivery, it is handed out by Mark to his chaplain, 'who breaks the wax and reads it': 'Having quickly taken in the contents, he repeats it to the king, who listens with great attention' (l. 2512–18). Mark decides during a council to have Tristan bring Iseult back to him. He im-

mediately orders the chaplain, who is attending the meeting, to put what he just heard down in writing, and this letter is to be read out to Tristan by Ogrin, just as it had been by the chaplain to the king before (l. 2656–2658). The interest of this scene is Mark's and Tristan's inability not only to write and seal, which are highly technical activities, but simply to read and understand a text, which was undoubtedly composed in Latin. The help of an in-house clerk is necessary, as if the mastery of Latin added nothing to their prestige. Lastly, nowhere in the romance is there any mention of learned women.

In Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* (c. 1210), the level of Iseult's, but also Tristan's education has considerably improved. The young maiden is made to enter a school run by the most learned of clerks, whom Tristan himself is to replace later on. The lovers write three letters in their own hands. In the first one, Iseult begs Tristan to come to Caerleon, where she is to be tried by ordeal to prove her faithfulness to her husband (l. 15554). Then they exchange two more letters whose courier is a Welsh jongleur (l. 16281, 16302). By and large, these two episodes are borrowed from the verse *Tristan* written by Thomas of Britain in the later half of the twelfth century. They are no longer extant in that original version, but survive in a very faithful 1226 Norse translation by Brother Robert. However, in this *Saga of Tristram and Ísönd*, which mirrors Thomas's earlier text, there is no mention of letters, but instead of some note about the ordeal, and of the jongleur who delivers the lovers' messages orally (§58, 63). The epistolary exchange thus appears to be a figment of the imagination of Gottfried, a learned clerk.

Women tend to write even more in the 1225–1240 prose *Tristan*. Bevide writes a letter to Tristan, whom she is madly in love with and who has just left her, to warn him that she will take her own life (§283). Iseult is almost as disappointed when she learns of her lover's marrying King Hoel's daughter: she immediately unbosoms herself in writing to Guinevere, who writes back to comfort her (§572, 582). Later, still in writing, she asks Tristan to come back to Cornwall (§778). She eventually makes a blunder when she writes a comforting letter to Kahedin, whom she has just spurned, but which Tristan finds, reads and mistakes for a love note (§840). Similar to Gottfried von Strassburg's story, the prose version makes the Cornwall lovers literate. Again in the early thirteenth century, the same configuration is to be found in *Lancelot*, where women write just as much: the Damsel of Escalot, to justify her suicide; Guinevere; the False Guinevere ... and so on. Is this improvement in the epistolary skills of the Britain cycle's heroes and heroines to be put down

to the nobility's increased literacy? Are the effects of the twelfth-century renaissance on the aristocracy reflected in Arthurian fiction? Does the replacement of letter-writing hermits or chaplains by the protagonists themselves reflect a social change? The above mentioned examples may not be numerous or significant enough, but there is indeed a good case to be made for a more widespread literacy in the aristocracy after 1200.

Marie de France

Marie de France is considered the earliest female writer of the French language, and probably the author of four collections of octosyllabic verses: the *Lais*, the *Fables*, a *Purgatory of Saint Patrick*, and a *Life of Saint Audrey*. She lived in the later half of the twelfth century, was born on the continent and belonged to the Anglo-Norman elites of Great Britain. Her *Lais*, a collection of twelve short narrative Breton poems, are dedicated to a 'most noble and courteous king', thought to be Henry II, and to a 'count William', whom she calls 'the flower of chivalry'.¹⁰⁶ More generally speaking, she claims that she is keen to communicate with her readers and win their approval. In the Prologue of her *Lais*, she declares her gift of eloquence, which was God-given and should as such be shared. It is this gift that had helped her shape the Breton oral narratives; by the same token, she had elsewhere confessed to having translated from Anglo-Saxon her hundred and three Aesopic *Fables*, and from Latin the *Purgatory of Saint Patrick* and the *Life of Saint Audrey*. This modesty is peculiar to medieval authors, who were aware that they were merely fashioning raw materials that had been handed down to them by their predecessors. It is by no means incompatible with the hearers' praise, as Marie herself says, disregarding, in the Prologue and the first of her *Lais*, the usual rhetorical hedges almost entirely, that she is seeking the fame that will save her from oblivion (l. 7–8 ; I, l. 3–4).

In the same passage, Marie goes on to say that the later generations had studied the Ancients' obscure books 'with greater diligence to find the thought within their words' (l. 15–16). Her work, which was much commented on and adapted at the time, was directed not only at a learned elite but also to a courtly audience who would not only listen to a tale but actively discuss it. Another testimony supports the existence of a curial sociability around the *Lais*. In his *Life of King Saint Edmund* (1170–1200), Denis Piramus claims he wishes he had not wasted his youth as a courtier

¹⁰⁶ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 179–181 and 561n90.

listening to and imitating false and frivolous songs, among which he mentions Marie's *Lais*, which 'counts, barons, and knights love and think of very highly' (l. 41-42). And the same goes for their wives: 'The *Lais* usually please women, who are keen and happy to listen to them' (l. 46). The latter remark may well be a reference to the feminine tone of Marie's tales, also noticeable in her fables.

The protagonists of the *Lais* are often female characters. Sometimes they can be very negatively depicted, like Arthur's libidinous wife, who accuses Lanval of raping her just because he would not accept her overtures, or Bliscavret's adulterous wife, who treacherously leaves him in his werewolf state, or the seneschal's wife who plots his death in order to marry her lover, King Equitan. But sincere lovers and faithful wives by far outnumber these harpies. They put their shrewdness and skills to good use to overcome situations that have sometimes been made unbearable by men. At times they enjoy real power—not only seductive or domestic but public power—over a male-dominated society. Such in particular is the case of the loving fairy who triumphs in the unfair trial brought against Lanval. Motherhood, the gynaeceum, feminine rumour which can make or undo reputations, feminine domesticity, and a nuns' convent are the background of *Ash Tree* and, albeit less palpably, of the other lays. In this respect, there is a wealth of details on everyday life. In *Milon*, there is even a travelling baby, 'nourished, bathed, and duly tended' (IX, l. 111-112).¹⁰⁷ Last, even though the theme of the mismarried woman is specific to lyrical poetry, it also reflects the aristocratic maidens' fear of forced marriages, which Marie considers 'a great sin' (VII, l. 28). The theme is developed in *Gugemar*, *Yonec*, and *Nightingale*, where young wives, by cunning and magic, deceive the old fogeys who have locked them up in dungeons or high-walled gardens. It resurfaces, albeit cast in very different guise, in the *Life of Saint Audrey* (Etheldreda in Anglo-Saxon (d. 679), queen of Northumbria), who refuses to consummate her two marriages in order to become abbess of Ely instead. All of these stories, as adapted or invented by a woman, are deeply touching for female readers.

Feminine reading and writing often crops up in Marie's *Lais*. In one of them, a damsel gives birth in secret and sends her baby son to her sister,

¹⁰⁷ A similar female overtone appears in the *Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, four stories written in Welsh around 1128. This quality, together with the stories' political and geographical references, has recently caused the philologist Andrew Breeze (*The Origins of the Four Branches*, 1-54) to propose Gwenllïan of Gwynedd († 1136), wife of Rhys ap Gruffydd († 1137), prince of Deheubarth (South Wales), as their probable author.

with a purse fastened around his neck containing a sealed letter narrating her misfortune (IX, l. 78, 98, 116). While kept in seclusion because of her father's plans to marry her against her will, she receives a letter from Milon, her lover and the child's father, this time tied around a swan's neck (l. 161). Helped by her handmaid, she unties it, breaks the seal, discovers Milon's name, breaks into tears, kisses it, and eventually reads it (l. 225–230). Then she obtains, with 'the craft that was necessary, [...] the ink and parchment requisite for her writing. At the end, she wrote a letter according to her heart and sealed it with her ring' (l. 253–256). Thanks to the swan, they were to write back and forth for twenty years. In *Honeysuckle*, Tristan carves his name with a penknife on a hazel-tree wand (l. 54) and places it on a path for Iseult to stop her company and rejoin him. A more classical form of reading is that of the old widow who closely chaperons her mismarried sister-in-law in *Yonec* on behalf of her brother: 'she [...] commenced to read the psalter that she carried in her hand' (VII, l. 63–64). By contrast, the young woman dreams of the great love stories she has so often heard of (l. 95–104). There is a sharp opposition here between writing, Latin, and sacredness on the one hand, and orality, vernacular, and fiction on the other.

Marie de France's anonymity, albeit relative, raises a number of issues. Like most writers of her time, she never left any precise autobiographic detail in her works, perhaps for the readers to focus on her books' form and content with no interference from the author's persona. A complex and sophisticated poetess, she is, however, highly aware of the quality of her creation.¹⁰⁸ In the Prologue to the *Lais*, while assuming a pose of false modesty, she nevertheless prides herself on her science and rhetoric, of the numerous stories she knows and all the sleepless nights she spent versifying them (l. 1–2, 39–42). She claims she can translate from Latin, quoting now the grammarian Priscian of Cesarea (sixth century), now Ovid (l. 10, 30, I, l. 239). This pride stands in sharp contrast with those clichés of feminine humility and indignity that open what few Latin works were written by monials in those days. As the only woman of her time writing in a vernacular on profane themes, she makes a point of asserting her authority, or rather her 'auctoriality', if only through the name of Marie, which supposedly protected her books from men's plagiarism. In the name of her art, she can, like any clerk, fashion Breton tales, Anglo-Saxon fables, or Latin hagiography to her own liking.¹⁰⁹ It is with great

¹⁰⁸ Bloch, *The Anonymous Marie*, 18–19.

¹⁰⁹ Green, *Women Readers*, 218–219, 239–240.

pride that she expresses the following in the epilogue to *Milon*: 'I, too, who have set it down in writing, have won reward enough just by telling over the tale' (l. 532–534). For Marie to have appropriated such a literary tradition and put it down in Romance verses means that she must have already enjoyed great fame as an author.

The social acknowledgement of Marie's writing profession is reflected in two illuminated portraits of her. They are to be found above two initials in a manuscript of her *Fables*, made c. 1300 for Mary of Brabant, the widow of King Philip III of France, today kept in the Arsenal Library in Paris. The first appears in the frontispiece to the *Fables*, and portrays the author writing with a calamus held in her right hand, while with a wand in her left hand she keeps open a page in a blank codex set on a lectern. The other is at the very end of the volume, and shows Marie perusing the book, which she holds in both hands. The miniaturist thus very cleverly has the beginning and end of the writing of the *Fables* coincide with the beginning and end of their reading. Both pictures show the writer wearing a veil, underneath which several locks of her hair protrude; she is wearing a tunic, only the sleeves of which are visible through openings in the long cloak that covers her down to her feet.¹¹⁰ The light colour of her clothes shows her to be secular, even though the veil seems to suggest the status of a pious widow. More significant yet is her involvement as writer, writing and rereading her own book with no assistance from any scribe. By contrast, Hildegard of Bingen is represented, in a famous miniature in her *Book of the Divine Works*, receiving divine inspiration, symbolized by the column of fire descending from Heaven over her head. She puts the divine words in writing on wax-covered tablets; behind her stands another nun, and, across the enclosure wall, a monk is copying her revelations on to parchment. Unlike Marie, Hildegard is not alone, but is flanked by one of her sisters. She does not invent her text, which originates in Heaven. Moreover, it is Monk Volmar who is in charge of its final editing, thus playing a clerical, masculine role as go-between. Complex as it may be, such an iconographic programme stands in sharp contrast with the miniature where Marie de France is to be seen in the solitary creation of a personal, profane work.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Ward, 'Fables for the Court', 190–191, 195–196.

¹¹¹ Green, *Women Readers*, 162, 183.

Trobairitz, hagiographers, and visionaries

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, several lyrical genres gave voice to women: spinning and weaving songs, dawn and mismatch songs, reverdies and pastourelles, and so on. The authors of these remain, however, unknown, and some scholars go as far as questioning their having been written by women at all. However, by no means does the same anonymity hold for the twenty-odd women troubadours whose names are known through the rubrics of their songs manuscripts. The Occitan romance *Flamenca* (1275–1300) uses—or coins maybe—the term *trobairitz*, the feminine of ‘troubadour’ as a name for them collectively. They were mostly active between 1170 and 1240, the decades which represented a golden parenthesis of sorts in the status of southern ladies, before they were downgraded by the revival of Roman law with its misogynistic legislation.¹¹² Forty-three of their songs are conserved, almost half of which belong to the genre of the *tenson*, an amorous dialogue of repartee between women or of women with men. This number is very low when compared with the 2,500-odd poems comprising the corpus of Occitan lyric: a ridiculous one or two percent, which reflects the tiny contribution of aristocratic ladies in troubadour creation, including only one female romance writer, Marie de France. Still, their indirect contribution to these compositions is worth noting. In particular, they are the recipients—albeit passively, in accordance with the codes of *fin’amor*—of men’s love songs. Moreover, the reciting of these at court cannot be imagined without a large feminine audience. Lastly, the high proportion of female troubadours in the composition of *tensons* shows that they were in a position to take part in these poetry soirees, improvising verses, alas, now lost forever.

All *trobairitz* whose social origins are known to us belonged to the lay aristocracy. None was a jongleur or a nun. Only Gormonda de Montpellier has left us a politico-religious *sirventes*, actually her retort—in favour of Rome and the Albigensian Crusade—to the anti-clerical diatribe composed in 1229 by the troubadour Guilhem Figuera. The other surviving songs are all love songs. Even if role inversion gave the female troubadour the floor, it also forced her, in return, to submit herself entirely to her lover in accordance with courtly patterns. The price of such a humiliation, forced by literary convention, was high: women had to subject to men if they were to sing their

¹¹² Paden, ‘Introduction’, 23–25.

praise.¹¹³ They also had to cope with the males' hesitations. Around 1220, Castelloza, the wife of Turc de Meyronne, a crusader from Auvergne, deploras the reserve of the man she is courting, a very common attitude in troubadours' sweethearts. 'Even though I feel in my heart you are quite discourteous, disdainful of me and conceited, I still make songs to spread your fame' (I, l. 4–6). The countess of Die, a character critics have been at a loss to identify, describes a similar attitude in her knight servant: 'My dear, it pleases me to surpass you in love, for you are worth more than I am. But you speak to me and treat me in such a haughty way when you are most agreeable with others!' (II, l. 11–14). All these verses are modelled on masculine *cansos*, where the poet humbles himself and stoically bears the lady's rejection, but still constantly entreats her. Yet the abnormality of the situation sometimes fosters originality in the poetry, for social conventions precluded women, unlike men, from begging for their beloved's favours. 'I know I am acting in a noble way, even though they all say it does not befit a lady to entreat a knight like this, nor to deliver such long speeches to him' (I, l. 17–20). *Trobairitz* were very skilful in playing on these paradoxes, sometimes on a parodist note, thus winning the attention of an audience that was increasingly weary of the old-fashioned themes of *fin'amor*.

It was most probably an aristocratic lady, Felipa Porcelet (1250–1316), who in the late thirteenth century wrote a hagiographical work in Provençal entitled the *Life of Saint Douceline*. The saint was the founder of a beguine in Hyeres, then another in Marseilles, where about twenty Beguines followed, as a community, the tertiary rule of Saint Francis. Douceline, who died a candidate for sainthood, was the sister of Hugues de Digne, himself an advocate of evangelical poverty within his order according the prophecies of Joachim of Fiore. Spiritual Franciscanism was very strong in Marseilles. It was there that Arnaud de Villeneuve (1238–1311), a physician from Valencia who had been in the service of the kings of Aragon and the popes, and the author of an extensive medical, alchemical, and eschatological work in Catalan, spent a few years directing a community of lay tertiaries who espoused the same doctrine. Felipa Porcelet belonged to a family that was favourably inclined towards this kind of spirituality. At least two of her relatives, Guilhem Porcelet (1288–1294), bishop of Digne, and Isarn were friars minors. Another, Guilhem Porcelet, lord of Fos, offered Raimon Jaufre, from the viscountal house of

¹¹³ Van Vleck, '*Tost me trobaretz fenida*: reciprocating composition'; Jay Siskin and Storme, 'Suffering love: the reversed order'.

Marseilles, and general minister of the order between 1289 and 1295, a manuscript of Joachim of Fiore's *Harmony of the Old and New Testaments*. Last, Maragde and Felipa, two of Felipa Porcelet's nieces, eventually joined her in her beguinage. A number of their relatives then insist on being buried in the Franciscan churchyard in Marseilles. All in all, the Porcelet family was strongly influenced by Franciscan religiosity, more often than not of the spiritual kind of the *Fraticelli*.¹¹⁴

When her husband died, Felipa devoted her fortune to the development of the two beguinages founded by Douceline, whom she succeeded as prioress major. It was then that she started writing her *Life*. Her late vocation, together with her will to spread her text among tertiaries and laypersons and the early spiritual Franciscanism's contempt of studies, may explain her choice of the vernacular. As she had been married at a very young age, she had not had the benefit of a prolonged stay in a traditional monastery, where she might have acquired an adequate mastery of Latin. Furthermore, she may have judged that reliance on a clerical mediator, and thus reverting in her narrative to the Church's language, would be likely to reduce the ranks of her less learned readers or hearers. Within her milieu, two anonymous authors wrote, likewise in Occitan prose, a *Life* of Saint Elzear of Sabran and his wife Delphine, two spirituals who remained virgins throughout their marriage, and the *Life of the glorious saint Francis*, translated from Bonaventure's *Legend* (1266). Felipa borrowed largely from this translation, including even a number of idioms she found there. She describes Douceline's extreme poverty, how she cared for the sick, her ecstatic episodes and episodes of levitation, her prophetic visions and miracle healings, and so on.¹¹⁵ The narrative reflects the author's attachment to her kin: Douceline's miracle interventions cure the Beguine Maragde Porcelet's aphasia and cause Rainaud Porcelet (1253–1299), lord of Cabriès, at last to produce an offspring (XV). Felipa even though she was religious, nevertheless remained close to her entourage and to secular life.

Interestingly, the use of the vernacular in hagiography is also encountered in the early days of the first Flemish beguinages. It was in the vernacular that Lambert the Stammerer (d. 1177), who was prominent in the movement in Liège and a suspected heretic, wrote a *Life of Saint Agnes* for maidens and translated the *Acts of the Apostles* as well as Saint Paul's *Epistles*. He added about twenty French prayers to the psalter. On Sun-

¹¹⁴ Aurell, *Une famille*, 165–170, 'Introduction' to *Actes de la famille*, LIII.

¹¹⁵ Brunel-Lobrichon, 'Introduction' to his trans. of *Life*.

days, he would organize meetings with a group of lay persons, many of them women, for whom he had written his books. Might Beatrice of Nazareth and Sister Hadewich, who put down their mystic experiences in the vernacular, have originated from this community? Their brand of spirituality is indeed reminiscent of the Beguine Mechtilde of Magdeburg's (c. 1210–c. 1285), who recounted her visions in German in *The Flowing Light of Divinity*. She claims herself to be uneducated, while deeming such wisdom as Grace endows the meek with to be superior to that of learned clerks.¹¹⁶ Another Beguine from Hainaut, Margaret Porete, who was burnt at the stake on the Place de Greve in Paris in 1310, opens her *Mirror of Simple Souls* with a poem advising humility, 'the treasurer of science', especially for theologians and clerks who are so proud of their subtlety of spirit (l. 5–11). Self-annihilation or *kenose* (Phil II, 6) is the indispensable prerequisite to fusion with God. She rejects intelligence's conceit, for sophisms are an obstacle on the way to Pure Love. She advocates the vernacular instead of learned and prestigious clerical Latin. And it turns out that the vernacular is closely associated with women, as Dante noted in his *New Life*: 'The first who began to write as a poet of the common tongue was moved to do so because he wished to make his words understandable by a lady to whom verse in Latin was hard to understand' (XXV).

Human knowledge, which fosters vanity, is opposed to such science as God infuses into the meek. The theme, a popular one with the 1300's Beguines, is by no means a novelty within the Church more broadly: indeed, it is to be found in Christ's teaching ('I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes.' Matth. 9, 25), as well as Saint Paul's ('Knowledge puffeth up.' I Cor. 8, 9). The idea of the superiority of simplicity over intelligence's conceit, and of heart over reason, was widespread in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, a reaction against the new speculative theology. It was particularly applicable to women, who were banned from the clergy and thus from a training in academic theology. Even though it was contested and even repressed by the academic establishment, 'learned ignorance' (*docta ignorantia*) in those days was not reserved for Beguines, dissidents, and other heretics. It is even discussed positively, albeit with reservations, in the quintessential scholastic work, the *Summa Theologica* (1265–1273) of the Dominican Thomas Aquinas. 'Science', he writes about the causes of devotion, 'is to

¹¹⁶ Grundman, *Religious Movements*, 79, 192–198.

man an occasion of self-confidence, so that he does not wholly surrender himself to God [...] while in simple souls and women devotion abounds by repressing pride' (II-II, q. 82, ad 3). For Thomas, simplicity and femininity are one and the same, but far from hindering piety they could even encourage it.

As the aforementioned miniature seeks to suggest, Marie de France wrote the book of the *Fables* in her own hand, with no help from any scribe. All through the Middle Ages, nuns were praised for the quality of their calligraphy. Their *scriptorium*'s activity was encouraged by monastic founders and reformers alike.¹¹⁷ Their handwritten copies would spread the Word of God, just like those produced by men, and as a 'mute predication', a phrase that was dear to Peter the Venerable's heart (ep. I, 20), even as public preaching had been strictly forbidden for women ever since the 1200's. There were also scribes in the ranks of laywomen. They would ply their trade in those urban workshops that developed in the thirteenth century. They may have learned their art within their families, the traditional place for the transmission of technical and artisanal know-how. The same goes for female miniaturists, one of whom, Jeanne de Montbaston, a copyist, represented herself at work in the bottom margin of an early fourteenth-century manuscript (Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms Fr. 22526, fol. 191).¹¹⁸

Did secular noblewomen routinely write in their own hands? And did they stick to the wax-covered tablets they had been used to in childhood? Or did they more often pick up a quill to write on parchment? The early fourteenth-century miniature in the *Codex Manesse* representing the poet Reinmar von Zweter (c. 1200–c. 1248) shows him in the company of a man who is copying his songs on wax tablets, and a young maiden copying on parchment rolls. Her refined clothes are rather aristocratic, but she may equally well fit the stereotype of the illuminator. She may even be a professional scribe, several of whom are well documented in Paris workshops.

One literary testimony may provide a better insight into how feminine writing actually functioned. Around 1200, it is related in the *Gerbert of Metz*, a *chanson de geste* from the Lorrains cycle, how Ludie, Count Fromont's daughter, secretly communicates with Hernaut, with whom she is in love, though he is defending a city being besieged by her own father. 'She cut out a little square of parchment and took some ink and a quill.

¹¹⁷ Beach, *Women as Scribes*, 1–30.

¹¹⁸ Rouse and Rouse, *Illiterati et uxorati*, 235–261.

She set out in writing the treacherous plot her father had masterminded against him, not very neatly, but still legibly. With a silk ribbon, she tied up the letter to an arrow, next to the feathers' (l. 5562–5565). She then begged an archer to send it express over to the enemy camp. Thus, like men, some women were able to draw up their own letters on parchment, which activity, however, as it requires a good deal of practice, is usually reserved for professional scribes, secretaries, and notaries. Indeed, as the *chanson de geste*'s audience would have expected, Ludie does not write 'very neatly'. In collective representations, damsels are rather seen sewing, or perhaps—the next closest thing to writing—embroidering letters on cloth. Such is the task performed, at the end of the thirteenth century, by one of the heroines of the epic *Renaud de Montauban*. 'The king enters a tiled room, where his sister is sitting on a cushion of golden cloth; on her knees lies a feudal banner which she is nobly illuminating, for she is learned' (p. 113, l. 26–29).

The superiority of feminine knowledge?

Did women read more than knights? Did they master writing as well as they did, or even better? Did they have a better grasp of the Latin language? Medieval sources shed very little light on such issues. All we have is a sycophantic poem by Baudri de Bourgueil (1046–1130), bishop of Dol in Brittany, where he extols the virtues of Adele of England, countess of Blois, and compares her with her father, William the Conqueror (1035–1087), who obviously outdid her in the wielding of arms, but not in culture: 'There is, however, an area in which she is superior: she loves poetry and devotes herself to reading' (134, l. 36–37). Baudry's flattery may well fit reality, given the well-known difficulties the Bastard had met as a child.

Around 1170, in his *Chronicle of the Dukes of Normandy*, Benoît de Sainte-Maure recounts William's taste for history, saying that the king 'had his ancestors' words and feats read aloud to him' (l. 34.899–03). Even though this is a late testimony, and the assumption that the king was illiterate is poorly supported, the scene described by Benoît was quite common among princes, all the more so if their eyesight became poor as they aged and they needed somebody else to read aloud for them. However, even if the girl's cultural superiority could ever be proven uncontestedly, it would at most confirm a generational change. The bishop of Dol would probably never have dared venture the same comparison be-

tween Adele and her brother Henry I, *alias* Beauclerc. To all intents and purposes, all he does is acknowledge that the countess is all the more praiseworthy precisely because she was an exception. We also have a few moralists' diatribes, which are equally unreliable as support of any sociological assumptions; among these, the sternest was undeniably Philip of Novara, who considered it useless and even harmful that girls should be educated to the same degree as boys. Vincent de Beauvais' or Pierre Du-bois' opposite theories serve to demonstrate that opinions were deeply divided on the issue.

Most mediaevalists consider, however, that within the lay nobility, women outshone men through their culture. Joachim Bumke seems to accept this, albeit reluctantly, and only after noting the clergy's superiority over all laypersons, and that the standard of Latin of female convents was so low that preaching was often made in the vernacular: 'Only by comparison with the totality of lay society may women be claimed to be better educated'. He writes also: 'The situation was very different with noble women within lay society, for they participated in educational life to a much greater extent than men'.¹¹⁹ According to Georges Duby, 'all sources show that their mastery of learned culture was more brilliant and extensive than that of males within the lay aristocracy'.¹²⁰ Dennis Green takes an even more unequivocal view: 'As readers of literature they, rather than their menfolk, are prominent'.¹²¹ On the sole basis of the content of romances, Doris Desclais Berkvam cautiously asks: 'Could it possibly be assumed that noblewomen's education, from the twelfth century on, was higher than their husbands' or brothers'?'¹²² Even though my review of the sources is by no means exhaustive, it has found no present-day scholar to support the opposite view.

Admittedly, there are at least two arguments that back up the assumption of medieval women's cultural superiority. First, the boys' military training was so time-consuming that it left little leisure for studying, which in any case was often frowned upon by their comrades in arms. There is a wealth of documents to evidence, for instance, the illiteracy of William the Marshal (1147–1219), a superb warrior, 'the best knight in the world' in the eyes of his contemporaries, and yet, as regent of Eng-

¹¹⁹ *Courtly Culture*, 340, 433. Before him, in Germany, this point of view appears in the seminal article of H. Grundmann, '*Literatus*', 14.

¹²⁰ 'The Culture of the Knightly Class', 258.

¹²¹ *Women Readers in the Middle Ages*, 248.

¹²² *Enfance et maternité*, 77.

land, one who might have been thought to be familiar with bureaucratic tasks.¹²³ Second, the reciting of Latin prayers, for which books were indispensable, appears as a common devotional practice for ladies.

It might be objected, however, that noblemen did have to master reading, writing, and accounting if they were to hold prominent offices in the administrations of princes, not to mention, of course, in the managing of their own estates. Even though they were helped by secretaries, it did not take them very long to understand how much extra influence and even power a learned education could provide. In this respect, William the Marshal, whose restless, nomadic youth supposedly precluded a good education, was probably the exception that proves the rule. Furthermore, psalters were not reserved for women only, since it was there that boys learned to read. Later on, they would also look up their psalters, albeit less assiduously than their mothers. One nice example is to be found in the prologue to the *Instruction* (1113–1125) that Vladimir Monomakh, grand prince of Kiev, wrote for his children in Russian towards the end of his life, as he sat on a sledge that reminded him of the impending great journey of death. He recalls how he had once refused, in the name of faithfulness to his oath, to ride along with his brothers against one of their allies. After he had turned down their messengers, who had met up with him on the river Volga, he felt dejected and decided to pray: ‘I picked up a psalter in my sorrow, opened it, and these words were before me: “Why are you sad, my soul? Why are you grieved”? (Ps 41–42, 6), and so forth. And then I picked out words here and there, and put them in order, and I wrote: . . .’ (§4). The next two paragraphs contain a number of verses from the psalms that are read out at the beginning of the Orthodox Lent (§5–6). The document is meant to instruct his children on how to steer clear of sin, be resigned in the face of adversity, and pray for the demise of ruthless enemies: those Vladimir no doubt has in mind are the nomadic Polovtseians, against whom he had fought all his life long. This prince’s attitude towards the Scriptures could not have been very different from that of Western noblemen, his distant relatives.

Much further west, the case of Robert, lord of Hatfield and Redburn (in Hertfordshire), is revealing as regards the knights’ taste for the Bible and for religious writing more generally. This is described in the *Gesta Abbatum Sancti Albani* (‘Deeds of St Albans abbots’), admittedly written at a later period by Thomas Walsingham (c. 1360–c. 1420) but inspired by older documents which had been compiled for the most part by Matthew

¹²³ Crouch, *William Marshal*, 6, 25.

Paris. The *Gesta* describe how Robert gave the monastery several tithes from his nearby fief which he was given at the time of the Norman Conquest. Robert also gave alms to the monks who were copying in the *scriptorium*. To give thanks to 'this lettered knight, who diligently listened to and read the Scriptures', the abbot Paul (1077–1093) provided Robert with liturgical books and objects for his chapel, but also authorised his librarian to copy several works in Saint Albans library (vol. 1, pp. 57–58). Apparently Robert was not satisfied with the psalter alone, since he attempted to obtain exegetic or theological works which would help him to better understand the Bible. To conclude, many male aristocrats, like their female counterparts, wished to widen their religious understanding and knowledge.

Moreover, the number of lady writers is ridiculously low in comparison with knight writers. These few clues tend to disprove, or at least to cause us to reconsider the assumption of women being more advanced. In conclusion, and in view of the documents available, which do not allow for quantitative analysis, it seems wiser not to attempt a calculation of the gender-based 'literacy' ratio. The best that can be attempted is to propose a broad separation on the basis of reading themes and categories: religious for women, legal for men, and literary for both. By no means can such a split claim to resolve the (arguably insoluble) problem of the superiority of female or male erudition. It does, however, shed light on the feminization of the Christian world in the Middle Ages.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, book culture spread fast among knights. Of course, it had never entirely deserted the Western elites, who, not unlike the Roman senatorial class and, albeit to a lesser extent, the early Middle Ages aristocracy, would often cultivate reading and writing as a sign of courtly distinction or a tool of government.¹²⁴ From the 1100's on, however, the intellectual renaissance, the impetus of scholasticism, the development of towns, the consolidation of central authority, the quickening of commercial exchange, and improvement in the standard of living opened up education to increasing numbers. Within the nobility, knowledge spread more than ever before, and reached classes lower in status that had never been able to enjoy it before. Even lesser warriors became occasional literary authors. And the traditionally learned high aristocrats were seen to extend their erudition well beyond their ancestors' elementary knowledge. It was a profound cultural mutation that the lay dominant class was going through at that time.

¹²⁴ See for a recent discussion, see *La Culture du Haut Moyen Âge: une question d'élites ?*

The new forms of knowledge brought knights closer to clerics; perhaps, indeed, the two categories were never really separated. It may have been rhetoric and the heritage of the classics that had forced intellectuals to make a clear and binary distinction between *fortitudo* and *sapientia*, *imperium* and *studium*, and thus between chivalry and clergy, which appear as their respective social hypostases. The fact remains that the two orders are perceived as existing together, if only through the character of knight using strategy, at once valiant and—because he is learned—cunning, or through the joint shift of studies and power from Orient to Occident. They can even be said to live in osmosis as they sit on top of the hierarchy in a world they intend to run single-handedly. Clear-cut as it may be, the clerical discourse, which was sometimes very critical of laity, does not obliterate the numerous bridges between knighthood and ‘clergy’. Preceptors and parish and monastic school teachers would complete the early education provided by mothers, who always kept a psalter at hand. The learning of Latin and the classics allowed most noblemen to read a contract, plead in court, or draw up the minutes of an assembly or a list of revenues. This ‘pragmatic literacy’ helped them in the day-to-day running of their estates. It also facilitated careers in the royal administration or the army, whose reorganization required new skills. It reinforced their social prominence at the top of an embryonic state.

Education provided knights with much more than mere legal skills. It provided an insight into letters. Some knights took to reading, building up their own libraries, or considerably extending their fathers’. They began to order from clerks very costly translations of the classics, to sponsor their personal creations, or to hire parchments, copyists, miniaturists, and bookbinders. Other knights, in turn, themselves took up quills to compose songs or even romances where they would depict in an idealized and benevolent way an aristocratic milieu whose values they are anxious to preserve. They wrote or dictated their memoirs, proudly recounting their adventures in war. As they delved into their own life histories, they exposed their own subjectivity in a quite novel way. Whether in verse or in prose, they embraced vernaculars and profane fiction, even though some over-rigorous clerics criticized them. All in all, letters and ‘pragmatic literacy’ neither contradict nor cancel out each other. Just like ‘clergy’ and chivalry, they are neither isolated nor tightly compartmented, but rather, within the lay aristocracy, they can be said to regenerate each other.

Nobility in the Middle Ages defines itself by its genealogic memory, its kinship and clientele networks, its castles, estates, and military supremacy. Its prominence rests on birth, power, and wealth. Should this

trilogy be supplemented by written culture? The widespread literacy in this milieu, at least from the twelfth century on, which sets it in contrast with most of the lesser social groupings, seems to suggest so. Could literacy then be claimed to provide 'symbolic capital' to those who hold it, in proprietary pride of this intangible heritage that ensures their hegemony in the social field?¹²⁵ Could it be said to widen the gap between the dominant and the dominated, the former mocking the latter's lack of culture more than ever before? Or else, is it more a case of ostentatiousness and elitist identity than of the personal, intimate assimilation of knowledge? It would be naive to discount the barriers that could—and still can—be erected by a knowledge that is restricted to cells, coteries, or microcosms. As was the case everywhere else, the medieval aristocracy used this knowledge to assert its distinction from the riff-raff, and most probably to better control the latter on their estates as well. As regards this scornful haughtiness, suffice it to mention again Walter Map's diatribes against those serfs who dared study liberal arts against noblemen who ought to preserve their monopoly over them. According to him, his recriminations against these parvenus had been confirmed by Ranulf de Glanville, the social epitome of the widely learned warrior.

It would, however, be equally reductive to restrict the social function of the noblemen's newly acquired education to their hierarchical self-assertion alone, or even to the reinforcement of their authoritarian government, or at worst to oppressive lordship. Letters did not teach them only to control their peasants. They also opened up their minds to the ancient treasures of literature, philosophy, and history. They sensitized them to artistic creation, thus refining their perception of their own conscience, of their fellow men and of Nature. They reminded them of the ideas of ancient philosophers and the New Testament on personal humility and radical equality within mankind. They contributed to social change in the genesis of the individual, in collective respect of public institutions, and in the advent of modernity. In order to analyse such a process, it is imperative that we look into the way knowledge, in those days, turned into courtliness.

¹²⁵ Bourdieu, *La Noblesse d'État*, 110.

Clerical Instruction and Civilizing Knightly Mores

In his collection of exemplary anecdotes, the Dominican Stephen of Bourbon (c. 1190–c. 1261) mentions Alain de Lille (c. 1125–c. 1203). Shortly before Stephen's birth, Alain was one of the most reputed Neo-Platonic philosophers of the Parisian schools. During the period when the famous theologian taught in Montpellier, numerous knights travelled to attend his lessons, attracted by his reputation. When they asked him what 'supreme courtliness (*curialitas*)' was, he would reply, with numerous arguments to back up his claim, 'generosity in giving and charity'. The knights acquiesced. Alain then countered by asking them to define 'supreme rusticity'. *Rusticitas* referred to the 'villeiny' of the country serfs who were at the bottom of the social ladder, and designated uncouthness, coarseness, and even pettiness and malice: in other words, all the values which ran counter to aristocratic distinction. The knights discussed among themselves to find an answer to what must have seemed like a trick question. However, they were unable to concur and therefore asked the master theologian for his opinion. The latter constructed his answer in accordance with scholastic rules: 'If we all accept the principle that 'ardent giving and charity are the most courtly of values', we would then have to conclude, conversely, that the most uncouth activity is to constantly steal and harm others and that those who dispossess the poor are the most uncouth' (§293). He concluded with the following: 'Since you live by pillaging, you are the most base and the most uncouth of men!' (§426).

Because it proceeded from courtliness, the quality so much cultivated by the nobility in order to distinguish themselves from the villeins, the criticism attributed to Alain is forceful and relentless. It emanated from a theologian priest. His lesson took the form of scholastic disputation with the knights, but his intellectual superiority over them was such that debate between opposing parties rapidly turned into Socratic maieutics in which the master led his disciples to 'give birth' to the truth. The clergy thus intended to use knowledge, or '*clergie*', to teach the knights how they might remedy their deviant behaviour. Such teaching was therefore supposed to render the aristocratic warriors more courteous and less uncouth. It referred back to the etymology of the Latin verb *erudire* ('to instruct, to transmit "erudition"') that the Dominican Vincent of Beauvais (c. 1190–c. 1264), a tutor at Saint Louis' court, placed at the beginning of his pedagogical Latin treatise, *On the Education of Noble Sons*: 'To instruct (*erudire*) implies to remove from rusticity (*extra ruditatem ponere*)' (I, p. 5).

The Montpellier lesson is an *exemplum*, an edifying anecdote which was added to a sermon. Alain de Lille himself specialised in homiletics.

His *Art of Preaching* illustrates a relatively recent pastoral attempt to use the word to reach all categories of lay society in order to profoundly evangelize them.¹ The book devotes an entire chapter to the advice which should be given to knights, in order that their exterior, physical battles might correspond, through an ascetic perspective, 'to their interior combat with the sword of the word of God, in order to restore peace within their own hearts'. He then immediately magnified their greed: 'The knights were specifically set up to defend the land and to protect the Church against the violent attacks of its enemies. Nowadays, however, they lead those who ravage other people's possessions. They are true brigands. They no longer exercise chivalry but plunder. Under the appearance of being knights, they represent the cruelty of the plunderer. They no longer fight enemies but rob the poor. Indeed, with the sword of their ferocity they persecute those they are supposed to protect with the shield of their chivalry. They prostitute their chivalry, since they fight only to gain wealth [...]. They sharpen their swords in the entrails of our mother, the Holy Church, exerting against their own people the force they should use against enemies' (40, §108–109). A few decades later, such admonitions were echoed in the anecdote of the confrontation at Montpellier. Part of their severity is borrowed from the heated, poignant, and often aggressive eloquence of the *sermones ad status*, which rebuke each of the various states of society, from the king to the peasant, including the merchants and even the secular and regular clergy. The nature of the rhetoric employed does not, however, provide a full explanation. It stems also from a definite clerical desire to reform aristocratic ways.

The mediaeval cleric, who was both an ecclesiastic and a scholar, sought to reform the lay elite in both his capacities. Firstly, the tonsure, and *a fortiori* his priestly ordination, made it incumbent on him to evangelize. Secondly, the teaching of letters to children had been inextricably connected to their moral education since antiquity. In Rome, the tutor had a duty to inculcate a sense of truth, of common good, and of equity in his pupil. For the tutor, grammar and rhetoric were not merely techniques of expression, for their teaching was based on texts from which moral lessons were readily drawn. In his *Institutio Oratoria* ('The Education of the Orator'), the famed grammarian Quintilian (c. 35–100) demands that the master of eloquence teach pupils, by his own example, to become 'a good man who knows how to communicate (*vir bonus dicendi peritus*)' (II, 20,

¹ Bériou, 'Aux sources d'une nouvelle pastorale: les expériences de prédication du XII^e siècle'.

4). This ideal was taken up and transmitted to following generations by Augustine of Hippo, the most esteemed theologian of the Middle Ages, who had himself been a professor of rhetoric before his conversion. Around 1080, an anonymous version of the *De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii* claims that 'the art of rhetoric keeps kings within the laws of moderation, reforms the knights who handle the weapons of Mars, and rules the ways of the young' (l. 136–9). Similarly to grammar, the use of history, defined by Cicero's *On the Orator* as 'the mistress of life (*magistra vitae*)' (II, 9, 35), is also exemplary, because it depicts the successes and failures of men, to be imitated or avoided as the case may be. This tradition was revived by twelfth-century thinkers who considered that 'the *trivium* teaches both eloquence and virtue'.² It therefore conditioned the way in which priests exercised their pastoral function among the lay population.

During this period, the intellectual revival was initiated by clerics, who justified their enthusiasm for the pagan classics by citing the ethical advantage to be gained from them. As scholars, they admired Stoic philosophy as presented in the elegant Latin of its adherents. They shared Cicero's conception of friendship and Seneca's humanism, the notion that an examination of conscience encouraged interior harmony and the contemplation of ideas, after all passion and all attraction to worldly goods had been extinguished. The twelfth-century intellectuals adopted Plato's classification of the four cardinal virtues and Aristotle's ethical commentaries. In the manner of Plato, they conceived the world as being the result of the archetypes or ideas of divine essence in which all living beings participated.

The clerics' admiration for classical philosophy was by no means incompatible with the theological training they had received before being tonsured or ordained as priests. Moreover, their masters had drummed into them tirelessly that philosophy was always at the service of theology, that it was indeed, according to the scholastic adage, the handmaiden of theology: *Philosophia ancilla theologiae*. However, recognisant as the clerics may have been of this classical heritage, they necessarily adopted a Christian perspective. They set the fervent love of Christ above the detached friendship of the Stoics. Faced with adversity or with enemies attacks, Stoic indifference was insufficient. Instead they commended the example of the Son of God, who obeyed the wishes of his Father and pardoned those who accused Him, in order to share in the merits of the crucifixion.

² Delhaye, *Enseignement et morale au XIIe siècle*, 60.

For the clerics of that period, misfortune could not be attributed solely to fate, which allowed the Stoic to assert his personality, to control his desires and to experience inner peace. An elimination of passion which went as far as to make an apology for suicide was certainly not the objective of their preaching.³ Their moral code was based on an ecclesiastical perspective in which participation in the sacraments administered by priests raised the individual to knowledge of the one God. Charity, which was the consequence of grace, was infused into the soul through baptism, which established the communion of saints, a superior link at the heart of medieval Christianity. Its theological nature placed this virtue within the supernatural order. On this point, their moral code differed from the friendship through which Greek and Roman philosophy promoted harmony among mankind.

Many medieval ecclesiastical works were intended to change the behaviour of their contemporaries. As such, they contained more persuasive or 'performative' discourse than abstract theological speculation. This intent is to be found in the writings of the first monks, who, since Cassiodore during the 550s at the latest, explicitly praised the monastic scribes and the 'apostolate' that the latter exercised through their reed pens. At the beginning of the twelfth century, Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, spoke of 'the seeds of divine words, dropped into pen-ploughed furrows on parchment' by the monastic scribe, who 'without breaking silence, without leaving the cloister, thus travels throughout the world, over land and sea'.⁴ But, in the Church, this pastoral vocation was more often the lot of the secular priests, to whom the episcopal hierarchy entrusted the caring for souls (*cura animarum*) rather than to the monks. This trend probably amplified during the early part of the twelfth century with the increased intellectual level of the clergy, who wrote more texts and delivered more sermons to the laity than ever before. The manuscripts preserved in libraries and archives certainly confirm the ongoing development of clerical 'literacy' and homiletic oral performance.

The actual influence on western society of the new twelfth- and thirteenth-century pastoral movement is still a matter of debate among historians. Indeed, there is no more complex issue than the impact of this 'propaganda'—a term which is not used here in a pejorative sense but in its original sense of *propaganda fide*, 'the propagation of the faith'. The

³ Morris, *The Discovery of the Individual*, 15; Leclercq, *L'Amour des lettres et le désir de Dieu*, 137.

⁴ Ibid.

available sources do not provide quantitative data and hardly provide any information regarding the religious practices of the laity, or the pacification of their behaviour. Such sources are above all normative, offering an ideal rather than confirming or negating the reality of this ideal effect in everyday nobility's life, still less its internalisation through individual conscience. These texts do, however, shed light on the development of chivalry, courtliness, and Christianity. The various aspects of the warriors' behaviour will therefore be examined in turn: behaviour in combat, towards women, in manners, and in religious practices.

WAR AND THE CODIFYING OF VIOLENCE

The clerics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries admired Alexander the Great for his military exploits, and still more for the knowledge he learnt from his master Aristotle. Similarly to the ancients, however, they criticised him for his vices. They even describe him as the *victor victus* par excellence, the 'victor who is vanquished' by his own passions, from the heights of his conquests succumbing to the baseness of his sins. In his *Policraticus*, John of Salisbury denounces his insatiable greed, quoting the letter in which the Brahmins, detached from all wealth, tell him that a man who is not content with conquering the whole world will always live in the unhappiness of dissatisfaction (IV, 11). This was the reason why John considered 'poor Pythagoras to be greater than the fantastically wealthy Alexander'. The emperor's desires are so 'irrepressible that he even cried at his father's victories because they overshadowed his own glory'. He adds that Alexander went as far as killing with his own hands, or condemning to death, all those who reminded him of the exploits of Philip (V, 12).

Gerald of Wales describes Alexander the Great as being corrupted by ambition. He also claims that he had a propensity for alcohol, which resulted in epic rages but also flagrant injustice towards his subjects. One of them who was victim of a judicial error one evening, due to the emperor's drunken state, returned the following morning and obtained satisfaction. With false naivety he asked himself which of the two he should believe, the drunken Alexander or the sober one? The king's alcoholism even led to his undoing, when he is said to have perished after drinking a poisoned cup of wine during an orgy. This was indeed the reason why Gerald mentioned Alexander of Macedon in the chapter of his *Education of a Prince* dealing with the violent and bloody deaths of tyrants (I, 17, pp. 58–59). Also in the Anglo-Norman clerical milieu from the end of the twelfth century, Thomas of Kent ridiculed the degrading liaison between the king and Candace of Meroe, who craftily took advantage of her 'blind lover's' (§513) uncontrollable desire in order to entrap him. Lastly, according to Chrétien of Troyes, Alexander's generosity in high society, 'which concentrated all the vices and ills in his hands' (I. 18–19), for all the praise it elicited, could never equal the theological charity of Philip of Flanders, Chrétien's patron for the *Story of the Grail*.

The moral of the story

The clerics had no hesitation in pointing out Alexander the Great's faults. Even if they admired his prowess and knowledge, they certainly did not consider him the supernatural hero, born of the gods, of Greek or Roman tradition. They considered him a mortal whose humanity was debased by original sin and whose vices were exacerbated by his paganism. He therefore needed to be corrected and improved like anyone else. Alexander's treatment at the hands of late twelfth-century intellectuals provides an indication of their commitment to a programme of moral reform. By stigmatising the vices of such a high-ranking person, despite the fact that he was dead and buried, they demonstrated their desire to modify the behaviour of the princes and knights of their times. In order to spread this message of conversion among their contemporaries, they had no compunction at all in exploiting history and various stories of an anecdotal and playful nature that might move their audience more than dry remonstrations.

Each exemplary anecdote effectively demonstrated an abstract affirmation which encouraged its audience to follow its moral. Such techniques are of course as old as the hills. Even today, specialists in political communication remind those who govern of the superiority of storytelling over abstract argument when it comes to the seeking and exercise of power. And yet this method was almost naturally inherent in the discourse of mediaeval clerics, who learnt it through writing from an early age. It was also employed by the tutors of boys of noble descent who were destined for a military rather than an ecclesiastical career. Thus the *Four Ages of Man* by Philip of Novara claims that the masters of pupils from aristocratic homes 'have to teach children stories' (§20) from books written by good authors. Storytelling is almost inherent to the clerics' faith, but also to that of their warrior brethren. To paraphrase the historian Alain Boureau, medieval Christianity, based on the ever-present event of the Incarnation (the presence of God in human affairs), reveals itself more through stories than through precepts.⁵

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the reform of knightly ways often stemmed from writing. Compiled at the court of Alphonso X of Castile (1252–1284), the enormous corpus of legislation known as the *Siete Partidas* contains a specific clause detailing the reading matter that knights should engage in at table. This clause follows the article reminding them of the moderation they should exercise regarding food, drink,

⁵ *L'Événement sans fin: récit et christianisme au Moyen Âge.*

and sleep. Such austerity should make them hardier in battle (II, XXI, 19). In order to reach such moderation the king advises that 'in the same way that they learn their calling through sight or through practical experience of war, they should learn it through hearing during peacetime'. At the dining table 'stories of military exploits' should be read out to help them imitate 'the intelligence and efforts that others were able to deploy in order to obtain victory'. The text adds that formerly, in the absence of books, 'worthy old knights' or jugglers were solicited to recount notable deeds or actions during meals. Warriors also had someone read, or remind them, of such stories when they had trouble sleeping at night. 'Thus, by listening to them, the strength of their determination and their bravery increased and they endeavoured to do good, while trying to attain that which had been achieved by others, or by dying for that cause' (II, XXI, 20). Uttered by the King of Castile, this injunction was perhaps inspired by the monastic refectory where frugal meals were accompanied by readings from the saints' lives which were meant to be imitated by those at table. Yet this took place in a secular context, for the exemplary nature of the stories was connected to the exercise of war, which was banned for clerics.

The comparison between the reading of military exploits and hagiographical accounts is not irrelevant. It is picked up on by at least one mediaeval source. At the beginning of the twelfth century, an anonymous monk used this same comparison to justify his writing of *The Deeds of the Princes of the Poles*. 'Holy men are raised higher by their works and miracles, and the kings and princes of this world by their triumphant wars and victories. Thus, if it is suitable to preach the lives and passions of the saints in churches, it is also glorious to recount the triumphs and victories of kings and dukes in the schools or palaces' (III, prologue). The monk then continues by adding that 'these stories encourage the knights'. Similarly to the Castilian *Siete partidas*, the Polish *Deeds* recommend the use of stories in order to strengthen the military virtues of the knights, and more particularly bravery, endurance and the abnegation of fighting to the death. Even if they are advocated by clerics, these qualities would seem not to be of Christian origin. They are rather of an anthropological nature and have been inculcated by warriors in all human societies.

Other accounts insist more heavily on Christian virtues. The dissemination and reception of the story of William (d. 812–815), count of Toulouse, is particularly well documented for the early twelfth century. A first cousin of Charlemagne, William became duke of Aquitaine and fought the Muslims, retaking Barcelona. At the end of his life, he founded Gellone Abbey where he became a monk. He was both saint and warrior and was

venerated by the faithful. He was sung of in epic poems under the name of Guillaume d'Orange, or the Marquis au Court-nez (the Marquis of the Short Nose, probably because of a mutilation at war). In 1112, a papal bull mentions 'the vernacular songs' which exalt the town of Orange, undoubtedly an allusion to the epic cycle in honour of the duke. A century later, the archbishop of Arles recalled the legendary victory of William and his companions at Aliscamps, his town's cemetery which, he claimed, preserved their relics.⁶ The prologue to the Latin life of Saint William, written in Gellone abbey around 1125, mentions 'the young choirs and the assemblies of the people, including knights and noblemen, who sang of his exploits at gatherings for holy saints' days'. Orderic Vitalis may have consulted the life of William at Saint-Évrault. A monk from Winchester who was temporarily staying at the abbey lent it to him long enough for him to summarise the story on wax tablets so that he could later add it to his *Ecclesiastical History*. He claims proudly 'that rightfully, this genuine account should be preferred to the jugglers' vulgar songs about William' (VI, 3). In fact, even if his account is judged superior, his remark reveals, above all, the interaction between Latin hagiography and a *chanson de geste* that the monk had probably heard.

Orderic Vitalis also relates how several young knights in the entourage of Hugues d'Avranches (d. 1101), count of Chester, follow the teaching of his chaplain Gerald. In order to encourage them to convert, Gerald, who was famed 'for his faith and his virtue, but also for his mastery of letters', introduced them to the exploits of several Old Testament warrior saints. He also mentioned Christian soldiers, several of whom were martyrs: Demetrios, George, Theodore, Sebastian, Maurice (leader of the Theban Legion), and Estache and his companions. But it was the story of Saint William which encouraged several of Hugues d'Avranches' young knights to take up the cloistered life (VI, 2). The use of the lives of the warrior saints to encourage knights to convert is explicitly recommended by Alain de Lille: 'Knights should consider the example of the holy martyr Sebastian, who, while plying his trade as a soldier under the emperor Diocletian, did not abandon his spiritual struggle, "rendering unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's"' (Matthew 22:21). Alain then cites the highly esteemed Victor, Hippolytus, the Theban Legionaries, and many others who 'wore the baldric of the knighthood on the outside, and who fought inside with devotion to God' (40, §108).

⁶ *Gallia Christiana Novissima*, vol. 6 (Orange), coll. 40-41, no. 72 (18 X 1112), and vol. 3 (Arles), coll. 310-312, no. 773 (c. 1205).

The lives of saints were disseminated to the laity not only by preaching. Joinville remarks that Louis IX, for example, read them out loud. It was indeed only on such occasions that he was forced to abandon his rule to never pronounce the name of the devil (§687). It may be noted, in passing, that the reference to Satan, the Christian enemy, provides an indication of the agonistic dimension of hagiographical accounts. The knights were receptive to what such accounts taught of the interior struggle against the devil, and they identified with martyrs who had fought as warriors well before their own time, or with Saint William of Toulouse who fought untiringly against the Saracens. Their military exploits adorned the hagiographical accounts which dealt mostly with asceticism, sacrifice, piety, martyrdom and monasticism. Such accounts served to transmit more profound spiritual messages in a way which was particularly attractive for the knights.

The authors of vernacular fiction sought above all to entertain an audience who were wont to immerse themselves in adventurous and fantastic tales in order to escape the realities of daily life. They nonetheless believed that their literary creations could change the behaviour of their readers and audience, for they considered that conversion went hand in hand with entertainment. The scholastic clerics admired Aristotle and knew that aesthetics and catharsis are intimately connected. The notion of art for art's sake was probably foreign to their thinking, as indicated by the declarations of intent contained in several Germanic romances from the period. Around 1210, in the prologue to his *Wigalois*, Wirnt von Grafenberg calls for his audience's attention and then claims that 'poetry purifies the character and each and everyone may find improvement therein' (l. 86–88). Sixty or so years later, Albrecht insists, in his continuation of Wolfram von Eschenbach's *Titarel*, on the benefits of literature for the warrior class. 'He who would exercise chivalry in chivalrous fashion, in moments of happiness and moments of sadness, should never tire of listening to those who talk, sing, or read out loud of chivalry. It will provide him with more knowledge and bravery than merely enjoying himself fighting with lunatics [...]. Books in German have been written in all honesty in order to learn such virtues [...]. This work contains nothing frivolous. Those who never listen to readings in German are on the road to ruin' (§2958–2961). The didactic role of such vernacular works is thus clearly expressed.

Around 1215, the moralist Thomasin von Zerklære indeed declares that young knights should be advised to read religious books, but he by no means bans them from reading the adventures of the Knights of the Round

Table. For their instruction he writes: 'They should listen to the stories of Sir Gawain, Cligès, Érec, and Yvain. From the most tender age, they should act in accordance with the unshakeable example of Sir Gawain. Think of the noble King Arthur who provides you with so many good teachings' (l. 1041–1047). Yet Thomasin, who was so often rigid in his attitudes, declares elsewhere that he is suspicious of the 'lies' of literary fiction (l. 1118). If he was so enthusiastic about the Matter of Britain, it was perhaps because he was aware of its recent adoption of a Christian overtone. Indeed, the first Arthurian prose romances, written at the beginning of the thirteenth century, explicitly set out to promote their readers' spirituality. Around 1205, a prose *Merlin*, based on Robert de Boron's poem, has the wizard explain the reason why he decided to dictate his own story, and the equally instructive adventures of the guardians of the Holy Grail, to his mother's confessor: 'You will write a book of all this and the many people who will read it will become better and will move away from sin. You will thus offer them this story as alms, thereby accomplishing good works' (α, §16, l. 39–41). Similarly, the *Story of the Holy Grail* (1225–1235) asserts that Galahad, Joseph of Arimathea's son, demonstrated 'such integrity that his prowess, exploits, words, and works must be remembered by all honest people, so that the wicked may be removed from their folly and that the good, who maintain chivalry, may mend their ways towards God and towards the world' (§446). These authors thus clearly demonstrate their intention to improve the behaviour of their noble audience.

Arthurian prose reveals an undeniably moralising tone analysed in detail by Catalina Girbea in a study significantly titled *Communicating in order to convert in Holy Grail Romances*, published in 2010. These romances, she notes, are punctuated throughout by moral digressions. They introduce sermons given by bishops, by chaplains, and above all by hermits, and even by the voice of God himself, who thunders from the heavens, or by angels who adopt the most unexpected human and animal forms. They constantly quote the Bible, and some of their pages resemble centos pieced together from various passages of Scripture. Other rhetorical passages, encouraging repentance, express their message less openly. They are revealed above all in the acts carried out by Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table which are punished or rewarded on earth by immanent justice. Some wholly positive characters, such as Galahad (the son of Lancelot) or the sister of Perceval, who is the incarnation of pacific and generous femininity, demonstrate perfect identification with Christ, whom the reader or the listener is supposed to imitate. Thus, alongside the

openly religious messages, the authors also send implicit, and more subtle, messages regarding standards of behaviour which are perhaps more effective for being so. In these romances, the appearance of religion, the constant presence of the miraculous and the moralising tone is perhaps reminiscent of the hagiographical genre, which, according to Orderic Vitalis, awakened the monastic vocation among the young knights.

Rebuking greed, violence, and vanity

Preaching, hagiography, and romance criticise the vices which the clerics claim were particularly entrenched in the lay nobility. The foremost of these vices would seem to be greed, the same vice with which Alain de Lille reproached the Montpellier knights. Between 1210 and 1213, another Parisian scholar, Cardinal Robert de Courson (d. 1219), devoted a whole chapter of his *Somme* to this topic. In this *book* he describes it as ‘the violent usurpation of another person’s goods [...] by force, ill use, fraud or false witness’.⁷ The arbitrary nature of seigneurial levying was openly referred to by the words ‘ill use’, designating abusive taxation which was neither established by custom, nor negotiated with the peasants. Étienne de Fougères (d. 1178), bishop of Rennes, similarly reprimands the knights in his *Livre des manières* (1174–1178), which explores the states of society in Anglo-Norman verse. If he is to be believed, most noblemen were lacking in the most basic sense of duty towards the weak, whom they simply stripped of their possessions. ‘They steal, cut down, oppress and exhaust the hungry, upon whom they impose burdens [...]. After having eaten and drunk their rightful income, they cheat the peasants by demanding still more from them [...]. How shameful, my God, that they should be named lords who are never idle when it comes to doing harm’ (l. 545–556). The origin of aristocratic income is thus condemned.

Pillaging and murder

The knights also make vain display of the fruits of their pillage. In his *Elucidarium*, written at the beginning of the twelfth century, Honorius Augustodunensis rebukes them as follows: ‘They live by depredation and

⁷ Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms latin 14524, fol. 63v–64, quoted by Bisson, *The Crisis of 12th Century*, 449–450.

clothe themselves from pillaging', adding that 'they steal other people's goods out of pride and greed' (II, 54). Their unrestrained taste for luxury drives them to commit all manner of theft. A century later, the Dominican Humbert de Romans (d. 1277) denounces the same fatuity in a sermon in which he derives the word '*rober* ('to steal') from *robes*, by which they elegantly designate their noble clothes'. He continues: 'Their castles were built for the poor to be able to find refuge during periods of persecution, but they have now, alas, become a refuge for thieves and robbers. They were equipped with numerous tolls in order to defend travellers but the latter are subject to their attacks. It is from these strongholds that they mount raids on churches. Monasteries, hospitals, and sanctuaries are attacked, as if they were Saracens'.⁸ To conclude, the clerics understood the mechanisms which transformed seigneurial taxes into luxury goods. They knew that the fruits of hard labour in the fields were what contributed to the ostentatious lifestyle of the aristocracy and their festive generosity. They therefore denounced their abuse of the peasantry who were further impoverished so that the aristocracy might give free rein to their extravagant consumption.

Arthurian literature often depicts the repression of lordly theft by the wandering Knights of the Round Table. Such robbery is reminiscent of the tolls of the thieves' caves condemned by Humbert de Romans. Chrétien de Troyes describes Érec in the process of killing or chasing away eight knights 'who live from theft' (I. 2809) and who rob all those who venture into their forest. According to the *Story of the Holy Grail*, it was from the heights of their fortress, built on the Rock of the Port of Peril (§181), that Forcaire the bandit and his sixty or so men plundered the plains and also the vessels which they attracted onto the coast with large bonfires. In *Perlesvaus*, Lancelot helps a hermit to deal with four thieving knights whom he catches at night red-handed stealing his horse and weapons: he ties them up and hangs them from trees (VIII, l. 394–3609). In the exercise of feudal levies, the distinction between unjustified taxes, excessive tolls, and armed robbery is not always easy to establish. This was the reason why the clerics and writers of romances lumped them together, without distinction, in the general category of pillaging, looting, and robbery. They also associated such exactions with physical violence, as in the poem *Frequenter cogitans de factis hominum*, a review of the different groups of society at the end of the twelfth century: 'They remove, take

⁸ Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms latin 15970, fol. 353-376, 485 quoted by Lecoy de La Marche, *La Chaire française*, 358.

and tear away what they see with their eyes. The proud knights, the devil's horsemen, run here and there. Ferocious and furious, they single out cattle and men that they then proceed to steal or kill' (p. 132).

In the prologue to Book XI of his *Ecclesiastical History*, Orderic Vitalis states that he continues to write, despite his advanced age, for the glory of God and to reduce evil on earth. He uses an equestrian metaphor to express his desire to improve the laity. 'In the same way that the horseman uses sharpened spurs on a lazy horse, whipping it often for it to move faster, the kindly teachings of the Church stimulate the indolent, and check those who rebel with their admonitions.' In order to act on the conscience of his readers, his text, which is of a historiographical nature, uses storytelling for the most part. It contains many examples of violent lords, the cruellest of whom are Robert de Bellême and his mother Mabel, enemies of the protectors of his abbey. These noblemen are often punished by sudden death, after which they endure terrible retribution in the next world. They constitute the major part of the damned souls that the priest Walchelin describes encountering, at a crossroads in the middle of the countryside, on the night of 1 January 1091. The blackness of this 'army of knights', its banners and great horses is an indication of their crimes. They radiate flames, they carry swords, shields, and heavy, burning armour which cause them terrible suffering. They quarrel among themselves. Walchelin discovers his brother among them, and questions him about the blood spurting from his spurs. The latter replies: 'It isn't blood, but fire, which is heavier than if I carried the Mont-Saint-Michel. In the past I used sharpened, shiny spurs to hurry to the places where I spilled blood. It is therefore quite fair that I should carry this unbearable weight on my heels' (VIII, 17). Under the pen of the monk of Saint-Évroult, the folk theme of the *Mesnie Hellequin* ('Harlequin horde'), the hellish cavalcade of revenants, becomes a vast *exemplum* condemning the knights' brutality.

Orderic Vitalis' ghostly cortège is reminiscent of the Perilous Cemetery in *Perlesvaus*: at nightfall, a horde of black horsemen, excluded from Christian burial because of their unabsolved sins, attempt to enter the graveyard. They then throw themselves at one another, mutilating each other with their flaming weapons (VIII, 1. 5079–5088). The fury of these revenants, who ape the military actions they carried out during their lifetime, is an explicit condemnation of the deadly sin of wrath. The corpus of hagiography provides abundant anecdotes of wounded knights, or of knights who are sent to hell, because they refused to obey the pacifying orders of the saint. According to an anonymous *Life*, written around 1070,

Isarn (d. 1047), abbot of Saint Victor in Marseille, paralysed and blinded the men of the lord of Tourtour (in the Var region of Provence) who had murdered two young people and stolen cattle from one of his priories (§26-27). Hariulf (l. 1060–1143), abbot of Oudenbourg near Bruges, relates the punishment inflicted upon the lady of Veurne who refused to put an end to the bloody conflict which she and her family had instigated in order to avenge the death of her husband and son who had recently been killed. In his *Vita* of Arnoul (d. 1087), bishop of Soissons, Hariulf describes how she refused to allow the prelate to enter her castle, raising the drawbridge when he arrived and deriding his request that she make peace with her enemies. By way of punishment, a storm destroys the fortress, killing the ‘fierce woman’, because she fanned the flaming hatred of her family (§88–89).

Such examples of the miraculous punishment of angry knights, and sometimes of their equally savage womenfolk, are not unusual in eleventh- and twelfth-century hagiography, but they tend to die out subsequently with the strengthening of royal power and the development of a more peaceful society. These miracles are not incompatible with other, more benevolent, divine interventions. Heriman (d. 1147), abbot of Saint Martin de Tournai, recounts the miraculous healing of the son of the lord of Buzançais (in the Berry region of Central France), who was born deaf and dumb, thanks to the relics of the Virgin Mary which were carried in a procession by the canons of Laon. The local population advised the canons not to cross the Buzançais lands because, they claimed, the lord ‘is so greedy and fierce that he will take all their possessions’ (I, 5). But they were wrong, since ‘on returning from his plundering’, the lord heard of the miracle and, in his gratitude, praised Our Lady and rewarded the canons with alms. Heriman goes on to describe how ‘this brigand, moved by the mercy of the mother of God, along with his knights and other inhabitants of his lordship, place the case containing the relics on their shoulders and carry them, barefoot, to their enemies’ castle’ (I, 6), two miles away from their own castle. They meet their adversaries in friendship and joy, in accordance with the ritual of reconciliation and with the exchanging of oaths around the reliquary, as provided for by the Peace and Truce of God, a movement promoted by the bishops, by the end of the tenth century, the aim of which is to impose the knights to swear to not doing violence against non-combatants. In the story told by Heriman, God, instead of mutilating, heals through the intervention of his mother. He reassures the violent robber knights, encouraging them towards a conversion, which is also motivated by their fear of punishment and damnation. Hagio-

graphical anecdotes thus stirred up the desire for protection, or conversely, fear of punishment, but always conveying a pacifying message.

The furious, murdering combatants described by the Saints' Lives are suggestive of the frequent Romanesque sculptures representing Herod's hired assassins, wearing hauberks and helmets, who kill the Innocents with their swords. The tyrant sends them to accomplish their bloody task, in the same way that the henchmen of an avaricious lord assault and pillage the peasantry. The *Acts of the Apostles* brings to mind the tragic death of a homonymous relative mistaken for his namesake during the Middle Ages: 'Immediately the angel of the Lord struck him down because he did not give glory to God, and he was eaten by worms and died' (Acts 12:23). If they wish to avoid the same fate, the lord and knights who obey his iniquitous orders must abandon their exactions. Similarly to hagiography and Scripture, iconography reserves a grim fate for criminals and thieves of the warrior aristocracy. In the tympanum of Sainte-Foy de Conques, a knight is dragged from his charger by two devils who immediately cast him down to hell where the worst tortures await him. Thus, through sculpture, the fear of eternal chastisement is exploited in an attempt to put an end to the knights' robbery and other abuses. Adam of Eynsham (d. 1233), the presumed author of the *Life* of Hugh of Avalon (1140–1200), bishop of Lincoln, describes the saint being outraged by the sight of an old amulet that John Lackland was wearing around his neck and which he had just shown him with pride. To encourage him to mend his ways, Hugh pointed out the crowned heads on the façade of Fontevraud abbey, which were represented as being cast down to hell on the day of judgement (vol. 2, p. 140). This story provides an example of the pedagogical aid that the clergy gained from the use of images.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, homiletics provide a few choice examples of the warriors' violence. The 'frenzy' and the 'madness' of a 'corrupt order of knights' are explicitly denounced in a sermon given by Cardinal Jacques de Vitry (d. 1240), bishop of Acre, who condemns their physical assaults on unarmed clerics and, even worse, on the peasants 'upon whom they impose arbitrary labours, without leaving them even enough bread to survive'.⁹ Raymond Lull attacks aristocratic brutality with equal vehemence in his *Book on the Contemplation of God* (1273–1274), a work which examines the states of society in accordance with Étienne de Fougère's model. He describes the knights as the 'Devil's executioners'. 'Using the same weapons which should be used to annihilate

⁹ Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms latin 17509, fol. 104-106, quoted *ibid.*, 357.

evil, they kill the just and those who prefer peace over war'. They ransack and pillage the land. Destruction follows them wherever they go. 'The knights kill the men folk, empty the towns and villages, cut down trees and vegetation, turn wives into widows and rob the highways'. Lull then provides a long list of the knights' other vices which range from adultery to magic and divining. He lingers on their bragging, which takes on a suicidal tone as regards battlefield exploits (CXII, 2, 15, 19–25). Such pride quickly degenerates into wrath, releasing their most violent instincts. If Raymond Lull's rhetoric is to be believed, their bloodthirstiness was boundless. Indeed, as the ecclesiastical writers tell it, it was often pride, envy, and wrath which corrupted the knights. It is therefore unsurprising that they should describe them as 'tyrants', and play on the words *militia* ('kighthood') and *malitia* ('malice') in their treatises to make them to amend their behaviour.

Hunting, tournaments, and games

The clerics detect an innate penchant for violence in the pastimes practised by the nobility. John of Salisbury delivers a fierce criticism of hunting. In his *Policraticus* (1159), he writes as follows: 'Hunting is a stupid occupation, and even quite disagreeable, and the advantages of its successes never make up for the disadvantages of its extravagance.' And yet the powerful have no hesitation in 'expelling the peasants from their fields in order to allow wild animals to graze freely', and thereby be able to give free rein to their 'immoderate penchant for pleasure' which excites their passion for the hunt (I, 4). Salisbury thus totally condemns the extending, by the Normans, of the royal and lordly preserve or 'forest' in England to the detriment of ancestral peasants' rights. A century later, in his *Teaching to Kings and Princes*, the Franciscan monk Guibert de Tournai (d. 1284) is clearly inspired by Salisbury's remarks when he reproves the nobility's almost religious enthusiasm for hunting and their even greater enthusiasm for falconry, describing these pastimes as 'sweet madness', 'unequalled frivolousness', and 'fruitless and laborious art'. He does accept that if need be, hunting should be engaged in, but always in moderation and with respect for the possessions of the poor (pp. 10–12). Injustice against the peasantry is often associated with hunting. The nobility did indeed appropriate communal woods, from where peasants gathered firewood, construction materials, and animal feed or found food to supplement their diet. Hunting game on horseback through fields, fallow lands, and forests allowed the nobility to visibly mark out their territory which they could

enjoy as they pleased.¹⁰ If the villagers subsequently failed to respect the nobles' sole enjoyment, they would accuse them of poaching, a crime which was ruthlessly punished. The Augustine canon William of Newburgh (1136-1198) voiced the following protest: 'Henry I of England, who was mad about hunting, coveted game beyond reason and, when pronouncing judgement, hardly distinguished between someone accused of having killed a deer and someone accused of having killed another human being' (I, 3, §10). In his *Courier*, a long German didactic poem based around the deadly sins, Hugo von Trimberg (c. 1230-1313), a master at the abbey school of Gangolf near Bamberg in Bavaria, associates the building of castles near the woods with the practice of hunting: 'Christian nobles settle in the fallow lands where they intend to live in the wild forests along with the wolves and the bears; they then build castles in the same places to torment the poor' (I. 22766-70). In these lines, the moralist establishes a connection between lordly oppression and wild animals, providing a realistic representation of the wild animals which were hunted but at the same time an allegorical representation of the lords themselves. Their castles are described as being more akin to hunting lodges to protect the forest preserve, rather than agricultural centres to assist pioneering efforts for the clearing of land. To condemn the abusive results of hunting for the peasantry, intellectuals used highly visual language. They dwell on the bloody flesh of the slain deer to symbolize the knights' plundering and murder. They even went so far as to use the metaphor of destructive cannibalism, as opposed to the Eucharistic communion which was the foundation of the Church. Walter Map asserts that the royal foresters or gamekeepers 'sacrifice the flesh of humans to the Leviathan devil and drink their blood' (I, 9). His colleague Gerald of Wales depicts William II Rufus of England eating raw human flesh the evening after a hunting party.¹¹ More generally, the texts reflect the clerics' repulsion towards the spilling of blood, any form of which was forbidden for them by canon law, including hunting. Their prejudice against hunting was strengthened by the disdain, typical of Stoic philosophy, for the unbridled frenzy and euphoria which this form of 'diversion' (in the sense of 'diversion from God') provoked among the nobility. In old French, the term *desport* was often used for hunting, thus conveying the etymological nuance of pleasure derived by 'being carried outside oneself', by abandoning one's interior self-control in a form of worldly ecstasy. This term has of course provided the modern word 'sport'.

¹⁰ Morsel, *L'Aristocratie médiévale (Ve-XVe siècle)*, 184-187.

¹¹ Buc, 'Principes', 320-321, and *L'Ambigüité du Livre*, 112-122, 225-227.

In his *Conquest of Ireland*, Gerald of Wales cannot restrain himself from reproaching Henry II with 'spending more time on hunting than on religion' (I, 46). Lambert d'Ardres makes an almost identical criticism, observing disdainfully that his lord, Baldwin II of Guînes (d. 1206), 'listens more attentively, at dawn, to the hunting horn than to the church bell; he accords more importance to the barking of the greyhounds than to the voice of the chaplain or the vicar; he is more easily dragged out of bed by his falconers than by the guardians of the temple; he more readily applauds the goshawk or the falcon turning in the sky than the priest who is giving a sermon'. Lambert immediately expatiates on 'the intemperance of his flesh and his lascivious impatience, which stirred him from the first agitation of adolescence to his senile years'. Such lust drives him to 'corrupt more virgins than David, Solomon, and Jupiter', fathering a multitude of bastards the exact number of which no one can ascertain (§88-89). Lambert thus uses the rhetorical technique of continuity (between his master's passion for hunting and his debauchery, between hunting game and hunting women), in order to underline one and the same laxity of the senses. There is an old legend with roots in the same ecclesiastical reproach: a knight is punished by being eternally condemned to difficult and frenzied hunting for having left Sunday mass during the consecration in order to pursue an animal he had heard passing near the church.¹² The compulsive and obsessive temptation which leads noblemen to prefer hunting activities to their religious duties condemns them to eternal damnation.

Tournaments elicited the same enthusiasm as hunting among the knights and, consequently, the same ecclesiastical admonitions. Tournaments provided the nobility with similar foretaste of battle than hunting. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, tournaments still resembled a battle in the middle of the countryside, with two armies in contest amid general confusion over a large area of land. This was the reason why they were the object of canon law condemnation from as early as the Council of Clermont in 1130. The *Decretum Gratiani* reiterated the oft-delivered papal prohibition: 'We ban foul fairs and markets, called 'tournaments' in the vulgar language, in which knights are accustomed to gather together to display their strength and reckless daring, often resulting in death and endangered souls. If someone is mortally wounded, we will not deny him his last rites, but a Christian burial will be refused' (V, 13, 1).

Around 1200, Jacques de Vitry examined the seven deadly sins that any knight unavoidably committed at a tournament. He constantly returns

¹² Aurell, *Les Noces du comte*, 220-221.

to pride, which incites the jousters to give in to all the other vices. Envy, for example, swells up in the hearts of the participants in the tournament, because it aims at 'the person who has the best reputation at arms, becoming the object of superior praise'. Lust develops 'because they want to please shameless women, by showing off their skilful handling of weapons'. Gluttony was the counterpart to generous festivity, viewed in a negative light by the preacher who would have preferred alms for the church, or for the poor, rather than such wasting of food, organised above all to attract the admiration of other knights: 'For worldly vainglory, those who participated in tournaments invited each other to banquets' (§141). Mother of all vices, pride is essentially an unbridled desire to please, and an uncontrolled sense of honour. This was what led the poet Rutebeuf (c. 1230–c. 1285) to assert, in his *Nouvelle complainte d'outre-mer*, that at tournaments the knights exchanged 'paradise for vain glory' (l. 123).

Around 1240, the *Vulgate Merlin Continuation*, an extensive prose book from the long Lancelot-Grail cycle probably written by a cleric from northern France, is equally critical of tournaments. With his considerable experience, the wise King Ban proffers a piece of advice to young Arthur which should earn him the respect of his knights and the fear of his enemies: 'If you wish to keep your kingdom, do not allow your knights to fight each other in tournaments, because, through envy, they may be filled with wrath, despite the fact that they are good knights. They should instead go to the border of your kingdom and enter tournaments against foreigners' (§558). Arthur and Guinevere immediately agree with him. Royalty thus adopts clerical discourse. It is a fact that monarchs did often ban tournaments, fearing that such gatherings of armed noblemen might lead to excessively open challenges against their authority, or even to rebellion. They were also aware of the serious wounds and deaths caused by tournaments, which reduced the number of combatants available for their armies. But they also recognised the unique value of tournaments as training and preparation for war. In the 1190s, laws were passed to reduce violence and human losses at tournaments. From then onwards, they were to be organised under the control of judges who applied strict rules, including, more particularly, the use of blunted weapons. Tournaments thus progressively developed into *bohorts* (individual jousts or clashes inside walls), which were very different from the twelfth-century battles. In 1316, Pope John XXII finally lifted the canon law ban.¹³ This progressive

¹³ Crouch, *Tournament*, 121–131, Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 80.

codification in fact reflects as much the strengthening of monarchy and the legislation by which the aristocrats were henceforth bound than the influence of clerical intellectuals over aristocratic behaviour.

Increasingly regulated, the tournament henceforth resembled a parade, in which each knight wished to shine individually, admittedly by displaying his military skill, but also through the quality of his steed and weapons, the splendour of his apparel, or the age of his lineage which was proclaimed out loud by the heralds. The jousting sometimes imitated episodes from literary fiction, particularly of Arthurian origin, which led to the adopting of disguises as fictional characters and the imitation of their actions by the jousters. The first of these thematic tournaments or *pas d'armes* ('passage of arms') is attested by Philip of Novara, who claims it took place in Cyprus in 1223, with the jousters taking on the roles of the Knights of the Round Table. The colonial aristocracy thus incorporated western European romance into their festivities, perhaps in order to signal more clearly their Latin identity. In Europe, it was not until the proclamation of a decree of Henry III of England, in 1232, that the term *Tabulae Rotundae* became synonymous with the tournament. At the same period, only the nobility participated in the *bohorts*, in imitation of the wandering knights of Breton romance. In his *Frauendienst* ('Service of the Lady', 1255), the *ministerialis* Ulrich von Liechtenstein (c. 1200–1275) describes his travels between the Styrian marches, where he originally came from, and Vienna. Disguised as Arthur returning to earth from heaven, he challenged the knights he crossed on his way. He accepted into the Round Table those who managed to break three lances with him, giving them the names Lancelot, Yvain, Tristan, Érec or Perceval. He went as far, in imitation of the romantic heroes, as to secretly change his coat of arms during a tournament, in order to be able to return and joust *incognito* in the role of Lancelot.¹⁴ In these Arthurian jousts, the knights modified their behaviour in order to comply with a literary model which determined their disguises and actions. Such imitation once again provides an indication of the influence of fiction on daily lives.

As well as hunting and tournaments, canon law also banned clerics from participating in board games. The tonsured intellectuals expressed their reprobation in similar language. They were particularly opposed to gambling, most specifically when it involved dice, because the outcome of such games seemed to correspond to diabolical forces. The participants in such games were passionate beyond all moderation, placing huge bets.

¹⁴ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur (550–1250)*, 508–510.

Hence the Dominican Catalan monk, Raimond de Penyafort (d. 1275), berated the greed, lies and blasphemy that they induced. Joinville relates Louis IX's 'holy anger' which erupted on the vessel transporting him to the Crusade in 1248: when Louis discovered his brother Charles I of Anjou betting early in the morning, he hurled himself at him, throwing his table, dice, and pawns overboard. Joinville adds, with some humour, that Charles's betting partner, Gautier de Nemours, made a clean sweep, taking advantage of the ensuing panic to carry off all the money which he hid under a fold of his tunic (§405).

In 1254, on return from his captivity, Louis IX of France intended to cleanse his country of the sins which had led to the failure of the Crusade. He proclaimed a reforming decree tackling official corruption, prostitution, and betting.¹⁵ The canon lawyers and the holy king were not the only ones to rail against dice, however. During the 1170s, a young knight asked the Gascon lord Arnaud Guilhem de Marsan how he should behave in order to win the heart of the young lady he was in love with. The former advised him to avoid games involving dice: 'Betting games are peculiar to the miser, who, to win a single denier, will roll the dice on the table a hundred times' (l. 462–5). This criticism appears in a secular and even worldly book on courtliness which was hardly influenced by religious considerations.

Chess was much more positively viewed than dice. Petrus Alphonsi advised noblemen who wished to succeed in battle to play the game, while also advising them to learn the seven liberal arts and to avoid the seven deadly sins. A Latin commentary on chess was written at the end of the thirteenth century by Jacobus de Cessolis and often translated. The author was a Lombard Dominican, and in order to encourage the conversion of his audience he interpreted the game in such a way that their social status corresponded allegorically to the different chess pieces and their actions to chess moves. The moralists took a more positive attitude towards chess because it left no room for chance, since the game depended solely on the players' capacity for thought.

Chess was little played outside the nobility. The warlike appearance of the pieces was even intended to aid training in military strategy. One episode of Chrétien de Troyes' *Story of the Grail* provides a comic reference to the chivalrous elitism of the pastime (l. 5653–6289). Gawain is courteously playing chess with the princess of the town of Escavalon. On hearing of his presence, the mayor, the aldermen, and the 'big and fat' bour-

¹⁵ Mehl, *Les Jeux au royaume de France*, 317; Martin, *Mentalités médiévales*, 260–261.

geois of the district, who accuse him of having killed their king, attack him with axes and halberds (vulgar weapons), but also with forks, flails, picks, and hammers (the tools of servile labour), and even with door flaps or riddles. Gawain defends himself with the help of Excalibur, using the chessboard as a shield, while the young lady throws pawns at them calling them 'villeiny, rabid dogs, serfs, gigolos, and the devil's messengers'. In this comic heroic parody of the *chanson de geste*, the contrast between the improvised weapons (the labouring tools) of the furious representatives of the district, and the prestigious sword of the knight of the Round Table, is highlighted by the way in which Gawain and the young lady he is courting use the chess game physically against the villeins.

The moralists may have lowered their guard. The fervour which they so often condemn in *desport* or leisure, could also find its way into chess. Around 1180, Daniel of Beccles' book on courtliness prohibited the excessive expression of anger while playing with dice (not unexpectedly, since they were so often decried), but also when playing the more politically correct game of chess (l. 1419–20). Written in Anglo-Norman verse at the end of the thirteenth century, although preserved only in a prose version, *Fouke le fitz Waryn* combines legendary and fantastic elements with the history of his main character, Foulque III (d. 1256), lord of Whittington (Shropshire), and of his ancestors. In order to justify his hero's revolt against John Lackland in 1201–1203 and his outlaw lifestyle, robbing on the highways and hiding in the forest, the author invents an anecdote. During their childhood, Foulque and Lackland, 'who was wicked, aggressive, and envious all his life', were brought up together at the royal court. One day, when Foulque beat him at chess, Lackland was so furious that he hit his companion hard with the board. Foulque retorted with a punch to Lackland's head. After coming to, Lackland complained to his father Henry II, who said that Foulque was right and ordered his tutor to beat his son (pp. 22–23). Also according to *Fouke le fitz Waryn*, when the vengeful Lackland became king, he attacked Foulque's estate, an injustice which drove the latter to become a dissident. The anecdote provides an indication of the intemperance of the most despised English king, while also warning its readers to retain self-control during games. Moderation was the most admired value amongst twelfth- and thirteenth-century thinkers, most of whom were clerics influenced by the rediscovery of the writings of the Stoics. They considered moderation incompatible with tournaments, hunting, and gambling, which clouded judgement to such an extent that it made the nobility violent and diverted them from religion.

The chivalrous ideal

For all its severity, the cleric's discourse on the knights did not merely criticise their faults. Negative criticism also implied the proposing of more positive, alternative models. While their function in society demanded that the knights use weapons to preserve peace and justice, their actions were still subject to a regulated framework. Thus, far from becoming trouble-makers, they could become the creators of harmony. The praise, in the *Deeds of the Counts of Anjou*, for Maurice, who ruled the principality during his half-brother Foulque Nerra's pilgrimage to the Holy Land, could also potentially be applied to the knights: 'He was a prudent and honest man, who loved good and peace, who ruled the county peacefully, through wisdom rather than through war' (p. 45). The anonymous monk who wrote the book then remarked upon Foulque's oratorical skills and scholarly eloquence, thereby establishing a connection between his peaceful wisdom and knowledge. Such discourse is in fact a more accurate description of the twelfth-century cultural renaissance during which the author wrote than of the year 1000 which he was describing, and during which princely education was in fact less highly valued.

Warring under the king for peace and justice

The quest for interior and exterior harmony is an ancient ideal. The Neo-Platonic masters of the twelfth century revived this quest. One of them, Bernard Silvester (d. c. 1159), asserted to the lord of Amboise that 'the enemy is more often defeated by the services one renders him, than by the sword' (p. 3). Written within the same intellectual milieu, *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, which has been attributed to William of Conches (d. c. 1154), similarly revives Stoic wisdom in its classification and explanation of the virtues. Notably, it claims that rigour (*severitas*) is better for human nature than diversion (*ludus*) 'which creates agitation, struggle, and anger, which in turn generate cruelty, enmity, and disastrous conflict' (p. 46). The author also encourages friendship, which he describes as a precious gift to be nurtured and protected by avoiding futile arguments, rancour, or vengeance (pp. 25–26). He reminds the combatants that their first duty is to reduce social injustice (p. 37). Similar admonitions, illuminated by anecdotes from Greek and Roman history, are to be found in the writings of John of Salisbury, a follower of William of Conches' teachings. This is notably the case in his *Policraticus*, where he analyses the role of combatants in society and their professional ethics.

Influenced by Platonic, Stoic, and Pythagorean philosophy, Bernard Silvester, William of Conches and John of Salisbury belonged to the same school of thought, generally referred to as the Chartres school. Their moral philosophy is much indebted to the classification of the virtues, and comments thereupon by Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Seneca, which Ambrose, Augustine, and the other founding fathers of the Church revived and disseminated throughout Christendom. The eleventh-century renaissance and its turning back to the classics made Greco-Roman ethics fashionable once more. But are we to follow the German philologist, Gustav Ehrismann, when he claims that this moral ideal, born in antiquity and rediscovered by the scholars of the twelfth century, is the source of 'a "knightly code of virtues"'?¹⁶ It is an attractive idea, since it proposes subtle crossover points between scholarly and knightly culture. With a few minor variations, the same idea also colours the views of other German scholars who argue that the institutions and values of the Roman senatorial class were preserved and perpetuated among the mediaeval nobility.¹⁷ However, neither the suggested continuity of the classical code of morals, nor its later revival, provides sufficient explanation for the specificities of twelfth- and thirteenth-century chivalry, which was born of a specific social context and inspired by a profoundly Christian philosophy.

No cleric of the period, not even those opposed to bloodshed, questioned the need for the existence of warriors to protect society. The legitimacy of their particular socio-professional class had long been established within Christianity. The Vulgate reports the advice given by John the Baptist to the soldiers (*milites*) who asked him about their profession, which is by no means forbidden as such: 'Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages.' (Luke 3:14). It is with these very words that Alain de Lille begins the chapter on the knights in his *Art of Preaching* (40, §108). Saint Bernard of Clairvaux's biographer, the Cistercian Guillaume de Saint-Thierry (c. 1075–1148), also uses these words to exalt the virtues of the saint's father: 'Adoring of God, tenacious in justice, he was a man of ancient, legitimate, and even evangelical chivalry, since he exercised it in accordance with the advice of the Precursor of the Lord' (I, I, 1). Ever since Saint Ambrose and his disciple Augustine of Hippo, theologians had reflected on the question of the legitimacy of certain wars.¹⁸ For

¹⁶ 'Die Grundlagen des ritterlichen Tugendsystems'. Cf. contra Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 301–302, Flori, *L'essor de la chevalerie*, 16–17.

¹⁷ Werner, *Naissance de la noblesse* Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*.

¹⁸ Contamine, *La Guerre au Moyen Âge*, 423–426

legitimate war, certain conditions had to be met. In his *Summa Theologica*, Thomas Aquinas requires just three conditions: declaration of war by the prince (never by a private individual), a just cause, and honest intent (II-II, q. 40, a. 1). Respect for the establishment was thus considered essential for the legitimate exercise of violence.

Good knights only went to battle when ordered to do so. They venerated the king, whom they followed blindly on the battlefield. According to John of Salisbury's *Policraticus* 'they faithfully loved the person who ruled under the authority of God: they therefore swore to bravely carry out the prince's orders' (VI, 7). Further on he continues: 'The knighthood [...] must abide by the prince in unceasing service for the common good' (VI, 8). In return, the king must not order any injustice to be committed. In his *De bono regimine principis* ('On good prince's government'), the Cistercian Hélinand de Froidmont (d. 1229) entreats the king to be prudent when giving orders to his knights, whose loyalty is taken as given. He also entreats him to watch carefully over their activities, which he, as the king, was generally responsible for. 'The prince has blood on his hands if his officers spill innocent blood, or if they oppress the innocent' (§24). Obedience was, after all, one of the knight's fundamental duties. It was essential for army discipline (which was strictly overseen by the king), and therefore also for the peace of the entire realm. The same was probably true for the interests of the nobility, their personal safety, and the safety of their possessions.

The knight's submission to the king, who in turn obeyed the law of God and of his priests, is one of the leitmotifs in Arthurian romances from the time of Chrétien de Troyes, who presents Arthur in a more human light. He represents him as kindly and considerate towards friends and family, who pay him back in kind. Out of respect for royalty and admiration for Arthur's military prowess, the Knights of the Round Table act heroically to fulfil their military and legal duties towards their king. In the Lancelot-Holy Grail cycle, the king's most loyal knight, Sir Lancelot, follows this rule of unwavering political or military loyalty. Lancelot has to deal with the conspiracies that Gawain's side foments against him, with the result that King Arthur becomes his enemy. His adultery with Guinevere is certainly highly disloyal towards his lord and prevents him from reaching the Grail despite all his qualities. Above all, he provokes the final tragedy and collapse of the kingdom along with the death of its finest knights.¹⁹ This is the only exception to Lancelot's loyalty to the

¹⁹ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 305–320, 466–480.

king, thus confirming the rule which dictates that respect for the monarchy is also vital for the nobility.

Loyalty towards rightful authority and respect for its legal institutions prevent the knights from settling their scores through physical violence, which always leads to private wars. The *Vulgate Merlin Continuation* presents an episode of a clearly didactic nature. Bertelai le Roux, who was 'of high lineage, having rendered many services to King Léodegan who loved him very much', mortally hated another knight because the latter had killed Bertelai's first cousin under the pretext that the cousin was in love with the knight's wife (§495). However, instead of complaining to the king, he challenged the knight to a fight to the death. Some time later he met the knight by chance one night and killed him with his dagger (§496). The victim's family calls on Léodegan's court, whereupon the king summons the assassin. Bertelai presents himself haughtily, wearing arms and accompanied by a crowd of knights. He defends himself brilliantly, basing his argument on the victim's felony which he claimed to have challenged in due form. The king nevertheless rejects his arguments and rebukes him for his vengeful act. He reproaches him with not having asked the king to judge his cousin's alleged murderer. Despite services rendered in the past, the king decides that the law must be respected. After having deliberated, the court, made up of ten high-ranking officers and presided over by King Ban, expropriates the lands of the accused and condemns him to exile for having taken the law into his own hands (§501-503). Since it was the king's prerogative, the knights could not take it upon themselves to punish murder under the pretext of custom. Conflict between knights would be dealt with by the king, not through the knights themselves resorting to violence.

The knighthood and dubbing

While it may have been legitimate and supervised, the use of weapons remained an evil, even if a necessary one. For the Church Fathers and mediaeval thinkers, the use of weapons stemmed from original sin which broke the harmony of creation. It had sowed discord between men ever since Cain murdered Abel. From that point onwards, the radical equality of mankind could no longer be respected. 'If we had not sinned, we would all have remained equal', wrote Peter the Chanter.²⁰ The Parisian scholar's

²⁰ In his gloss at Ez 34, 5, Bibliothèque nationale de France, ms latin 16793, fol. 52rb, quoted by Buc, *L'Ambiguïté du livre*, 341, n. 80. Cf. Freedman, *Images of the Medieval Peasant*, 71-79.

terse sentence picks up on an idea which had circulated widely, and which is to be found at the beginning of *Lancelot* (1215–1225), when the fairy Viviane initiates her young protégé into the knighthood. The author thereby suggests that the primitive nobility of all mankind, common descendants of Adam and Eve, could not resist envy and covetousness which introduced brute force into social relations to the detriment of justice. The weak and peaceful thus had to choose men of superior physical and moral qualities to undertake their defence (vol. 7, p. 246).

In 1275, Raymond Lull begins his *Book of the Order of Chivalry* with an account of the disgrace of our first ancestors: ‘Charity, loyalty, justice, and truth perished in the world; enmity, disloyalty, injustice, and treachery began’. Knights were appointed to restore the lost original order. Lull cites an etymology of *miles*, inspired by Isidore of Seville (9.3.32), to prove this founding event in human hierarchy. It comes from *mille* ‘(a thousand) men’, from amongst whom only one knight was elected, for his bravery and other qualities. He was to impose justice through fear, rather than through charity which had failed to provide justice. The root of the Romance equivalent, *caballer* (‘knight’), refers, also according to Lull, to ‘the most noble of creatures, the most apt to serve mankind’ (i.e. the horse, *caball*), which was given only for his use (p. 167). Original sin and human wickedness therefore justified the domination of the warrior class, who constituted an ‘elite’ in the etymological sense of ‘election, choice, selection’. It was the fear of their weapons which ensured a justice that love could no longer, after original sin, bring about on earth.

In accordance with the hierarchical outlook typical of the clerics, they define knighthood as an ‘order’, one of society’s constituted bodies, but also as a way of life which is embraced after an oath and the specific ritual of dubbing. They considered knighthood to be endowed with a very high mission, similar to the priestly order in its dignity and even in its sacredness. They sometimes use the metaphor of the body and its members, borrowed from Saint Paul (I Corinthians 12), in order to justify the hierarchy of the orders and thereby explain the diversity, complementarity, and unity of Christendom. According to John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus*, the knights are the arms and the hands of the body which receives its spiritual existence in the person of the clergy. They defend the body from its exterior enemies and they pacify its interior, but always under the orders of the prince who is its head. (V, 2, VI, 8). They were therefore entirely subjected to the king, who was the bearer of the temporal sword—the coercive power that he called on them to exercise in his name through the use of arms—but also to the bishops,

whose spiritual sword could excommunicate, damning the souls of troublemakers. The knights were, lastly, carried by their feet, the peasantry and the craftsmen (VI, 21). These organic conceptions lead quite naturally to an acknowledgement of the superiority of the knights, but also to their material dependency on the lower classes who ensured their subsistence. While they may have enjoyed undeniable privileges, they were also to be punished most severely, and in exemplary fashion, when they strayed from obedience to the king, or from the discipline of their profession, or if they corrupted the use of their weapons for personal gain (VI, 11). Demanding obligations, going as far as sacrificing their lives in battle (VI, 8), therefore accompanied their many rights. This, however, was essential to the balance of the society as a whole.

The *Liber de vita christiana* (1089), written by Bonizo (d. 1094), a canon lawyer and bishop of Sutri, is one of the first investigations of the states of society written in the West. Among the social orders for whom he intended his predication, the knights occupied an important place from early in history. Bonizo suggests that the knights were represented by the Roman centurion, whose faith was praised by Christ as being stronger than that of Israel (Matthew 8:10, Luke 7:9): he received the grace of the Holy Spirit even before baptism was instigated. The centurion's socio-professional category therefore occupied a foremost position at the heart of the Church. Bonizo incorporated the warrior class in the programme of ecclesiastical reform with which he was strongly involved. Leaving his Latium episcopal see for northern Italy, he supported Gregory VII (1073–1085), fomenting the *pataria*, a communal revolt against the simoniacal bishops. He attacked the emperor Henry IV (1056–1106) and was blinded and maimed in the imperial city of Ravenna, where he was attempting to take possession of a bishopric in the name of the pope. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that his *Liber de vita christiana*, written shortly after his mutilation, should insist on the knights' role in the struggle against heretics and schismatics, among whom he most certainly placed the partisans of Henry IV and of the antipope Clement III. Similarly, Bonizo insists on the knights' obedience and loyalty towards their lord, to whom they have sworn allegiance. They should be prepared to fight to the death for him as well as for the common good. 'They will take up the defence of the poor, widows, and orphans' (VII, 28).

The model of the perfect knight devoted to the Church and to his lord, whose enemies he will fight, owed much to the Gregorian reform which Bonizo of Sutri actively championed. His insistence on obedience towards established authority and on the defence of the poor stemmed from the

tradition of the Peace and Truce of God movement, through which bishops attempted to restore order in dioceses ravaged by conflict between different factions of the nobility. The mediaevalist Jean Flori suggests that in the tenth and eleventh centuries such prelates transferred the role model of the Carolingian king, who watched over the poor, the outcast, and the oppressed (generally referred to in Biblical and liturgical language as 'the widow and the orphan'), to the prelates' own *advocati ecclesiae* (who were in charge of keeping the peace on churches and abbeys estates) and later to the knighthood as a whole. Flori considers that Bonizo of Sutri was above all addressing those *advocati* or knights who served the bishops and abbots by protecting their lands and their rights, even if such advice was subsequently directed more widely at the whole of the warrior aristocracy which came to hold most public authority.²¹

The borrowing of themes from royal ideology by military professionals is further exemplified by the dubbing ceremony. Young men who wished to join the ranks of adult warriors had always had to undergo an initiation rite involving various ordeals, sometimes of a difficult and painful nature, as well as taking part in a ceremony of the handing over of weapons to them by their leader. This ceremony became progressively Christianised. Thus, from the tenth century onwards, bishops' rituals involved benediction and the casting of holy water on the new knight's sword, lance, shield, hauberk, or standard. These gestures were accompanied by the utterance of texts taken from the Old Testament and from royal coronation ceremonies, and required that the carriers of such arms and ensigns defend the Church against its enemies and protect widows and orphans. Originally, these prayers would seem to have been reserved only for princes and high-ranking nobles. During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, however, they began to be used as well for the ceremony of dubbing, or rather, in what one of their rubrics with a strong religious connotation termed, 'the knight's ordination'.²² This term conveyed at one and the same time vocation, vows, and consecration. Indeed, as Héliand de Froidmont has written, an aspiring knight could only join the ranks of the order 'if he is consecrated by an oath', and not of his own desire, but 'by God's calling'. Froidmont also adds that through the dubbing ceremony 'he merely makes a profession, exactly like the bishops or the abbots who offer up their *cedula*' (§23), probably referring to a document setting out the acceptance of their responsibilities and their vows.

²¹ *L'Essor de la chevalerie*, 253, and, more generally, *L'Idéologie du glaive*.

²² Document section in Flori, *L'Essor de la chevalerie*, 369–386 and *passim* commentaries.

In the 1100s, the religious implication of the ceremony was perhaps not generally apparent. The knightng ceremony of the young Geoffrey Plantagenet, Count of Anjou, at Pentecost 1128, as narrated in his biography by the monk John of Marmoutier, was certainly a most secular affair. It took place in Rouen, where Geoffrey was greeted by Henry I, king of England, and also his future father-in-law. He first took a bath (although no mention was made of any baptismal symbolism) and then received fine linen clothes, golden cloth, and silk. His coat of mail and chausses, hauberk, and helmet were adjusted and a shield was hung round his neck while he was outside, and not in a church. The lance and sword, forged by the legendary Wegland, were handed over to him. Twenty-five of his companions were dubbed along with him. Thus fortified by his 'new chivalry', he mounted a steed in order to display his military skills in a tournament. The festivities went on for a whole week, at the end of which Geoffrey married Matilda of England, his host's daughter (pp. 179–180). Both the dubbing and the wedding, which were celebrated collectively with military games and banquets, were treated at that time as rites of passage towards adulthood.

Lambert of Ardres' *History of the Counts of Guines* describes a ceremony of a much more religious nature. Baldwin II was 'promoted to knighthood' by Thomas Becket in 1170, shortly before the latter was murdered. (In passing, the chronicler describes the conflict between the archbishop of Canterbury and the king of England and the former's exile in Flanders as being as admirable as Moses' liberating the chosen people from slavery in Egypt.) 'As a sign of chivalry, the archbishop, great and holy among us, attached the sword to his side and put the spurs on his feet, then tapped him on the neck' (§87). Only the prestige of the future martyr, who had in his younger days led a huge army to the siege of Toulouse, might possibly explain the fact that he, as a bishop, handed the sword to the recipient and tapped him by the accolade.

Ten years later, Baldwin II in person dubbed his own son Arnoul d'Ardres, receiving the latter's 'military oath' (§91). In their family, there is no more priest conferring knighthood, which provides an indication of the exceptional nature of the administration of the dubbing by the bishop, on his own, without the assistance of a lay person. Again in 1213, in Castelnaudary, during the Albigensian Crusade, when Amaury de Montfort was knighted by the bishops of Orléans and of Auxerre, the Cistercian Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay was unable to hide his surprise, exclaiming: 'What a new and unfamiliar way of dubbing! Who then could hold back their tears?' (§430–431). It was clearly rare for prelates to undertake the

essential physical gestures of the dubbing, although this did not prevent them from taking a more discrete part in the ceremony.

At least from the end of the twelfth century onwards, the clergy played a role that, without being central, was nevertheless important during the dubbing, which almost always took place in a church. It was up to the clergy to receive the recipient's confession, to accompany him on occasion during his nightly vigil in a holy place, to celebrate mass, to preach, and to bless his weapons. To borrow the terms from Raymond Lull's *Book of the Order of Chivalry*, it was only at the end of the Eucharistic ceremony that the 'spiritual knight' (i.e. the priest) moved aside for the 'worldly knight' (an elder lay knight conferring chivalry, IV). The experienced warrior, often the mentor of the new knight who had learnt his trade by serving the former as a squire, became his godfather through the dubbing. It was he who handed him his sword and other weapons and who tapped him on the shoulder. The tap of the fist, of the palm of the hand, or, towards the late Middle Ages, with the flat of the sword has its roots in pagan warrior initiation rites. It symbolised the transfer of power from the officiating adult to the younger warrior whose endurance he thus tested. According to Raymond Lull, its role was mnemonic, the pain inflicted being intended to remind the new knight of the commitments he undertook during the ceremony.

In the 1150s, the handing over of the sword and other weapons began to give rise to long ascetic expositions, probably inspired by biblical imagery (Isaiah 59:16, Ephesians 6:11). It was at this period that Alain de Lille wrote the following words: 'May the knight take up the spiritual arms, the hauberk of faith, the sword of the word of God, the lance of charity, and the shield of health. He will thus be able to combat the three-fold enemy: the devil who shall not capture him, the world which shall not seduce him, and the flesh which he shall not covet' (40, §109). Longer still is the 560-line French *Armëure du chevalier* ('Knight's armor'), from around 1210, in which the monk Guiot de Provins lists military equipment as symbols of the virtues. The anonymous *Ordene de chevalerie*, another short French poem from the same period, presents a series of direct symbolic relationships, allegedly taken from Hugues de Tibériade's explanation to Saladin: the bath taken prior to the dubbing symbolises baptism; the recipient's bed becomes heaven; the white sheets, chastity; the red robe, the blood he will have to spill; the black stockings, death; the white belt, also chastity; the spurs, the virtue of diligence, and so on. (l. 110–88). Each element of the dubbing ceremony, and above all the weapons and the knight's other accoutrements, thus become allegorical representa-

tions of the spiritual qualities that the Christian warrior had to develop in order to resist the forces of evil. This psychomachia, which opposed vices and virtues, was seen as more important than the temporal battles the knight was involved in, since it would ensure his eternal salvation.

Written around 1275, Raymond Lull's treatise reiterates similar comparisons between the Christian life and the knight's weapons. Contrary to all his predecessors, however, he undertakes to justify his quest to attach such lofty significance to inanimate objects: 'All the clothes the priest wears to give mass contain significations which correspond to his office. Since there is concordance between the position of the knight and that of the cleric, everything used by the knight for his office must represent the nobility of the knighthood' (V). Endowed with such meaning, weapons and priestly garments are placed on the same semiotic, almost on the same supernatural level. For each of them, the liturgy provides a prayer which is intended to reveal their material symbolism. For example, the cord fastening the priest's alb around his waist, which was the seat of sensuality in mediaeval imagination, is associated with chastity, similarly to the recipient's belt.

The clergy and the knighthood belonged to the two orders at the very summit of mediaeval hierarchy. They governed what would nowadays be termed the 'Third Estate'. It is certainly true that his weapons were what provided the knight with his social predominance. These weapons were extremely expensive. It took a blacksmith two hundred and fifty hours of work to produce a sword of good quality. In addition, his constant training in the use of the lance, on horseback, gave the aristocratic warrior a significant advantage over the rank and file. He therefore looked down on the vulgar foot soldiers from his lofty seat on his steed. The knights were profoundly attached to the weapons which established their authority. By attributing a moral signification to the weapons, the clerics in one sense merely confirmed the hierarchy of the three orders; yet, at the same time, they also intended to reform the knights' behaviour.

Sparing human lives

The helmet and the hauberk protected the warrior from mortal blows. Moreover, due to strong feelings of class solidarity, regardless of sides, the knights avoided killing enemies of noble rank. The knights knew that sparing an enemy was a good investment, because they would be perhaps beaten another day by the same enemy. This attitude was accentuated by the fact that they often knew each other. Family links played an important

part in enhancing this mutual respect, since marriages were often arranged to confirm peace treaties between two enemies who were thus brought together in a political 'alliance', a word which can also be read in a matrimonial sense. The common blood which ran through the veins of cousins was thereafter not readily to be spilt. Lastly, it was more profitable to capture an enemy and demand a ransom than to kill him. Their own interests demanded that warriors show mercy towards those they had vanquished.

The role played by Christianity in the development of the rule that enjoined the sparing of a defeated enemy is difficult to establish, but it was certainly a contributing factor during the early Middle Ages.²³ Orderic Vitalis considers it one of the reasons for the small number of casualties during the Battle of Brémule (1119), in which Henry I of England's soldiers defeated the French troops of Louis VI. To explain the fact that out of 900 combatants only three were killed, as against 140 taken prisoner, Orderic Vitalis suggests three factors: the effectiveness of the hauberk, the knights' interdependence, and Christian values. 'They were covered all over by iron. They spared each other as much out of fear of God as from their close association. They tried to capture those who fled rather than killing them. As Christian soldiers, they did not thirst for their comrades' blood. Instead, they rejoiced in legitimate triumph for the good of the Holy Church and, with the help of God, for the peaceful existence of the faithful' (vol. 6, p. 240). The fact that the chronicler was a patriotic Anglo-Norman monk may have led him to overstate the piety of the victors and the rectitude of their intentions. It is nevertheless abundantly clear that Vitalis' analysis coincides with the teachings of the church of that period which reinforced the rule of respect for enemy lives among noble combatants.

From the end of the twelfth century, mercy became a central theme in Arthurian literature.²⁴ In Round Table romances, knights are constantly advised to spare their enemies. Kings, hermits, recluses, and mothers all unceasingly proffer such advice to wandering knights. In the *Story of the Grail* (1181–1190), Chrétien de Troyes places mercy foremost among the four commandments dictated to the young Perceval by Gornement de Goort, the lord who has just dubbed him: do not kill a knight who asks for

²³ 'It would seem that during the Carolingian era war between Christians lost some of the harshness and animal savagery of the Merovingian period'; 'This event [the Battle of Fontenoy, 841] demonstrates a desire to limit the horrors of war, based on the teachings of Christian morals', Contamine, *La Guerre au Moyen Âge*, p. 426–427.

²⁴ Chênerie, 'Le motif de la merci dans les romans arthuriens'.

mercy, avoid indiscreet questions, protect ladies and defenceless maids, and pray when you enter a church' (l. 1640–70). In his first romance, written between 1170 and 1176, Chrétien de Troyes had already related how Érec unhorsed several warriors whom he spared on condition that they surrender to Arthur and Guinevere. As the vanquished knights arrive, one after another, Érec's reputation grows, thus silencing the courtiers' former accusations of cowardice (*recreantise*) against him. His mercy thus restores his honour. After his marriage, Érec reputation was at stake, because his friends thought he had lost his courage. Thus, he embarks on a path filled with many hidden dangers in order to dispel any suspicions of cowardice which may have hung over him. The culture of shame, which was so deeply ingrained in aristocratic attitudes of the period, played a role which was equally important to that of evangelical Christian values.

The theme of mercy is also recurrent in Arthurian prose romances written after the style of Chrétien de Troyes. In *The Death of King Arthur* (1230), Lancelot and Gawain agree to fight to the death. The former defeats the latter, but his magnanimity gains the upper hand over the rule which he himself had set before the duel. His knightly assistants urge him in vain to finish off his 'mortal enemy' who is responsible for his misfortunes and still as vindictive as ever. 'The best and most courteous knight ever seen' did not want to decapitate an enemy whose courage he so admired (§157). The *Queste del Saint Graal* (1225–1230) attributes even greater magnanimity to Lancelot's son Galahad. The latter is unable to kill either Satan's helper, who attacks Melias, or the seven evil brothers of the Castle of Maidens. An irrepressible force drives him only as far as killing three brothers who govern the Castle of Carcelois and their henchmen. After the massacre, a priest consoles the guilt-ridden Galahad, explaining to him that he has just killed three monsters who are 'worse than the Saracens' and who are guilty of torturing their father, raping their sister, killing clerics, and destroying churches. The Carcelois episode is, in any case, the exception which proves the rule of observance of the fifth commandment, 'Thou shalt not kill', by the good knights of the romance.

The anonymous author of *Queste del Saint Graal* regularly reminds us that punishment for murder, impiety, and infidelity must come from above, and not from men, who must always imitate divine forbearance. Indeed, in his infinite mercy, God always awaits the repentance of the sinner whose life must therefore not be taken.²⁵ Probably written by a cleric close to the Cistercian order, the *Queste del Saint Graal* often resembles a treatise of

²⁵ Pauphilet, *Études sur la Queste del Saint Graal*, 33–36.

morals or a homily imploring the warrior to control his irascible propensities, and likewise his lust, with the help of grace, as symbolised by the Grail. More particularly, the *Queste* recommends transcending 'worldly chivalry', as personified by Gawain, the worldly and ill-tempered seducer, in order to attain 'celestial chivalry', embodied by Sir Galahad, a pious, ascetic, and almost completely non-violent paragon. In their striving for the grail, Galahad and his good companions now hardly use their weapons. In fact, celestial chivalry leads to the transcending, even perhaps the annihilating, of all violence, even when it is legitimate. By taking the consequences of the pacification of aristocratic mores to their ultimate conclusion, this extreme form of war carried out in accordance with ecclesiastical law paradoxically signs the death warrant of knighthood itself.²⁶

The Crusade as armed pilgrimage

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, Latin Christianity underwent an unprecedented territorial expansion, particularly in the Mediterranean region, to the detriment of Islam. In 1085, the King of Castile and Leon conquered Toledo, the former capital of the Visigoths. Christian knights subsequently obtained decisive victories over other emirates in Spain as well as over the Almoravid and Almohad reinforcements who crossed from North Africa in an attempt to stop the Christian advance. In 1212, the Christian victory of Las Navas de Tolosa definitively opened up the Guadalquivir valley. The Muslim kingdoms of Valencia and Majorca fell a few decades later. The situation was similar in Sicily, which was taken from the Muslims by the Normans at the end of the eleventh century. These conquests extended as far as the Holy Land, where the Latin states remained, after the taking of Jerusalem in 1099, until the fall of Acre, the final stronghold of the Crusader state, in 1291. The rise of a conquering knightly order in the West coincided with more fundamental trends which transformed society as a whole: the development of trade and agriculture, the mastery of new maritime techniques, the exponential demographic increase of aristocratic lineages and the military superiority conferred on them through the handling of the lance on horseback, and so on. The extended military effort in the Mediterranean could not, however, have been maintained without some form of religious ideology capable of overcoming clerical reticence regarding the bloodshed the process involved.

²⁶ Girbea, *Communiquer pour convertir dans les romans du Graal*, 65–76.

Written between 1183 and 1191, Alain de Lille's *Penitential* advocated forty days penance on bread and water for an unpremeditated crime of passion in which a Christian killed a Jew or a pagan (i.e., a Muslim). The sentence may seem very light but it by no means exonerated the murderer from a concomitant punishment in a civil court. More interesting still is the reason given by way of explanation for the sentence: '...because the Jew and the pagan were created in God's image and their death deprives them of possible conversion' (II, 58). For the church authorities, murder was always sinful. In Alain's view, the victim's religion did not significantly affect the degree of guilt. Many philosophers considered that any murder was intrinsically evil, even when it was committed by a knight in the course of his duties.

It was up to the clerics not merely to come up with an intellectual justification for war against the Muslims, but also to continually find reasons to encourage such warfare. In their war against al-Andalus, the kings of Castile and Leon were able to advance the argument that they were legitimately reconquering territories which had been unjustly taken from their Visigoth forebears. Regarding the rightful nature of the reconquest, they also added that they were re-establishing Christianity in territories which were gradually being reoccupied by their forces, rebuilding churches and returning their inhabitants to the true faith. The situation was different in the Holy Land where the Emperor of Constantinople claimed the right to govern.²⁷ Since 1054, the Great Schism had divided Latin Catholicism and Byzantine Orthodoxy, yet the call to the Crusade of Urban II at Clermont in 1095 nonetheless dwelled on the suffering of the Eastern Christians at the hands of the Turks.

Urban II certainly entreated the nobles present at the Council of Clermont to respect the peace of God in the West, but he above all encouraged them to bring such peace to the Holy Land which they would have to first free from Muslim domination and the problems that such domination entailed. According to Foucher of Chartres (1058–1127), a witness close to the Council, the Pope spoke the following words to the nobles: 'May those who have lived from plunder become the knights of Christ! May those who fought their brothers and family wage war against the Barbarians! May those who were mercenaries for lowly wages earn eternal compensation!' (I, 2). In his *Gesta Dei per Francos*

²⁷ Regarding Crusade ideology, see the recent publication by Flori, *La Guerre sainte: la formation de l'idée de croisade*, and on the Iberian peninsula more specifically, Deswarte, *De la Destruction à la restauration*.

(‘God’s Deeds through the Franks’, 1104–1108), Guibert de Nogent adds the following to the pope’s words: ‘You have until now led groundless wars. You have tormented each other with mutual carnage, often bombarding each other with projectiles. You were moved only by your cupidity and your pride. You therefore deserve eternal death and certain damnation!’ (II, 4). Also according to the same chronicle, the Pope conferred on the volunteers for the Crusade a distinctive sign, ‘similar to the knights’ baldric’: ‘He marked those who would fight for God with the stigma of the Passion of Christ, ordering them to sew a cross-shaped piece of material on their tunics, cowls, or travelling cloaks.’ This then was the origin of the name ‘crusaders’ (*cruce signati*), and from then on they wore ‘the sign which corresponded to their honourable profession’. The chronicle also remarks that Urban II ‘absolved them by the authority of Saint Peter’ (II, 5). From a military point of view, the same power of the keys of Peter was evident in the important role which was henceforth played by the papal legate, acting as the Pope’s representative, in the command of any overseas expeditions.

Similarly to Guibert de Nogent, and in accordance with the techniques of rhetorical embellishment practised by ancient Greek and Roman historians when recounting a politician’s speech, Baudri de Bourgeuil adds his own pinch of salt to the papal diatribe. In 1108, he writes as follows: ‘Although wearing the knight’s baldric, you cut your brothers to pieces and tear each other apart. Christ’s knights should not scatter the flock of the redeemer. The Holy Church kept knighthood to save its own, but you misuse it wrongfully in sin [...]: you oppress orphans, rob widows, commit murder and sacrilege, damage the goods of others, you spill Christian blood, you live from your robbery [...]. If you wish to save your souls give up the baldric of that knighthood to become the brave knights of Christ rushing to defend the Eastern Church’ (p. 14). To encourage troublemakers to seek penance for their crimes, Urban II urged that they undertake the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, the typical punishment for public sinners. While the first canon of the Council of Clermont set up the Peace and Truce of God, the second openly proclaimed the Crusade: ‘Whosoever left to free the Church of God in Jerusalem, solely out of devotion and not from desire for honour or wealth, took the road of penance for all of their sins’ (col. 816). The Pope thus granted the crusaders’ spiritual benefits and indulgences in remission of their sins, offering them a pilgrimage of penance to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in most conventional fashion. There was, nonetheless, one significant difference: this pilgrimage was undertaken with weapons.

The warrior combatants who left to travel overseas sometimes had much to expiate. In his *Sermon on Lord's Cross*, written the day after the defeat at Hattin (1187), Alain de Lille encourages the knights to become crusaders in order to imitate 'the good thief, to the right of Christ, through their penance, and not the bad one, to the left, through their violence' (p. 281). The image of the two thieves crucified next to Jesus, repeated on several occasions in his homily which aims to encourage knights to take up the Crusade, may perhaps refer to the harm caused in the West by such potential pilgrims. Alain claims that 'Christ finds no place in the knight's house which accommodates plunder' (p. 283). The departure of several of these desperados came as something of a relief for those who remained behind. Around 1125, the chronicler William of Malmesbury confirms this when he, in turn, adapts Urban II's call: 'Go! So that your crimes may cease. The Christian people in these regions will at last be able to live in peace. All the energy and cunning that you used to employ in civil war will be employed in a more just war. Go, knights, into all the world, like preachers! Go to those ignorant peoples! That merely pronounced, the famed power of the Franks may sow terror throughout the world!' (§347, p. 602).

The conversion was meant to be radical. Through their journey, the crusaders would not only pacify the country they left. Through the fear induced by their weapons, they would spread Christianity. There is a paradox in Malmesbury's passage quoted above: those exterminating angels are transformed into messengers of an 'angelic' sort (from the etymological sense of the word 'messenger'), but also, with a hint of naivety and tenderness, harbingers of the good news. They are to become the equivalent of Christ's apostles, evangelising distant lands. Indeed, the imperative words that the chronicler puts in Urban II's mouth, 'Go, knights, into all the world, like preachers!' is merely a repetition of Christ's commandment to the apostles: 'Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation' (Mark 16:15). The knights who do battle overseas may not accomplish that mission themselves, being devoid of theological knowledge, but, for the chronicler, their conquests would at least pave the way for the ecclesiastical preachers.

The crusaders rapidly gained considerable prestige, being sanctified by the sacrifice and hardships they endured in war. They did not, therefore, have to give up the world for the cloister, nor the hauberk for ecclesiastical dress, in order to save their souls. As Guibert de Nogent writes: 'In our times, God has instituted holy wars that the knightly order, and the rabble who accompanied them, and who killed each another like ancient pagans,

might find another path for salvation, without having to leave the world through monastic conversion' (I, 1). Again, in 1279, the idea that the crusader was embarking upon a saintly path, comparable, or at least almost comparable, to that of the monk, is apparent in a passage from *Somme le roi*, written by brother Laurent, which evokes 'the path of perfection, a life which is such a harsh and terrible choice': in other words, the path of evangelical counsel 'that is chosen by those for whom mere obedience of the commandments does not suffice'. Among this category Guibert de Nogent includes the clerics, of course, but also 'those who leave all their worldly possessions for God and who resolve to die overseas or elsewhere for the love of the One who gave his life for them' (56, §78–84).

The paradox of the soldier monks

In around 1150, Otto, bishop of Freising, declared that 'some, in spite of their possessions, and in the service of Christ, decide that the knight's baldric is not to be worn in vain. They therefore leave for Jerusalem where they embrace a new form of chivalry, directing their weapons against the enemies of the Christian cross. They constantly mortify their bodies to such a degree that their life and behaviour make them the same, not as knights, but as monks' (p. 320). Otto of Freising was Frederick I Barbarossa's uncle (the latter himself dying on the Crusade), and his narration plays on a certain ambiguity. Indeed, it is not clear whether the knights whose merits he extols are merely crusaders, or whether they belong to the military orders of the Temple, the Hospital, or the Holy Sepulchre. Such confusion is quite logical, since the soldier monks who protected the pilgrims and safeguarded the Latin conquests in the Holy Land were merely a logical development of the crusader mentality. The crusaders' objective was to reach Jerusalem in a repentant frame of mind in order to restore Christian government there. They thereby hastened the second coming of Christ, which was to occur in the Holy City. Peace and justice in the world would be restored for a thousand years before the world was destroyed. This eschatological vision was vital to the Crusade.²⁸ It was also vital to monachism, a lifestyle chosen by the military orders, whose members were the archetypal crusaders.

Some of Otto of Freising's terms are reminiscent of Bernard of Clairvaux's *In Praise of the New Knighthood*. In the latter work, written around

²⁸ Aphanéry and Dupront, *La Chrétienté et l'idée de la Croisade*, 50–56, 131–135, 216–221, 288–297.

1130, Bernard urges the Church to ratify the status of the Templars. His influence through this work became essential to the conferring of religious status upon them. The hybrid nature of the unprecedented status of warrior monks certainly broke the classical mould of canon law and by no means won unanimous support. Bernard's fellow Cistercian, Isaac de l'Étoile (d. 1178), could not find words harsh enough to denigrate the Templars for the plundering and forced conversions which they engaged in: 'A new monster is born of the new order of knights!' (48, 7). Walter Map, meanwhile, remarked 'that they take up the sword to defend the Christianity of Jerusalem, the very place where Christ prevented Peter from taking up the sword to defend him' (I, 20). The archdeacon of Oxford borrowed his dialectics from a gloss to the New Testament which was prevalent in the schools during his day. Indeed, his argument appears all the more effective since it refers to Jesus' order not to fight the guards of the Temple who seize him in the olive garden for avoiding him trial and crucifixion.

With such opposition to the monk soldiers, it took all the moral influence of Saint Bernard to obtain papal approval for the 'Order of the Poor Fellow Soldiers of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon', an order which allowed the monks to use the coercive power of weapons, even to the extent of killing or wounding. In his pamphlet, Bernard first played on the words *militia* and *malitia* in order to highlight the cruelty, greed, and impiety of the secular knights, whom he describes as 'the devil's knights'. By way of contrast, he then went on to praise the 'new knights of the order of the Temple', whose ascetic demands he found admirable. Indeed, wearing 'the soul of the hauberk of faith and the body of the hauberk of iron', the Templar constantly fights not only 'the evil spirits floating in the air' but also the 'flesh and bones' of the Saracens (I, 1). He therefore came to the conclusion 'that by killing the sinner he commits not a homicide but a "malicide"' (III, 4). His contemporary, Peter the Venerable, abbot of Cluny, also rejoices in the 'dual combat' of the Templars, who are 'monks by virtue and knights by their deeds' (*ep.* 172).

The unjustifiable is thus justified: the spilling of blood by a cleric who has pronounced the three vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. The military lifestyle did not always coincide with the rules which the soldier monks were held to. Stephen of Bourbon describes an anecdote he heard from Jacques de Vitry, bishop of Acre, condemning the excesses of fasting. During a battle against Muslim troops, a Templar was twice unseated from his horse. One of his brothers who risked his own life to save him on both occasions nicknamed him 'Sire, Bread-and-Water' and told him that there probably wouldn't be a third time. The moral of the story was that

‘embarrassed, he gave up his more ascetic habits, in order to live by the common rule’ (§188). The rule would thus appear to have been less strict for the Templars, as regards their dietary habits, than for other religious orders. This was also the case for their habits of sleeping and poverty. Excessive manifestations of pride were, however, forbidden. They were never to seek glory in battle individually, only collectively. They were not to speak of their military exploits. They were to wear clothes of a single colour and were to avoid any gold or silver in their equipment or in the paraphernalia for harnessing their horse. They had to sit during religious office, like the rest of the congregation, rather than remaining standing on the pretext that it would harden their bodies. The pleasures of hunting for birds were also forbidden to them.²⁹

Throughout the twelfth century, the nobility were enthusiastic about the military orders which rendered the practice of war and religion mutually compatible. Many of them became brothers, although more often as associates or ‘donats’, a lay group institutionally connected to the order, or *ad succurrendum*, taking cloth on their deathbed in exchange for their horse, weapons, and other possessions. Between 1160 and 1180, this favourable attitude towards the Templars was expressed in *Moniage Guillaume*, one of the songs from the Guillaume d’Orange cycle, which declares them superior to other monks about whom the anonymous author is rather dismissive throughout the poem. He goes as far as to claim that ‘the military orders are better than them, for they fight the Saracens, take their lands and conquer their towns, converting the Pagans to our religion’ (l. 621–4).

The military involvement of the laity in the Holy Land enjoyed similar prestige. The departure for Palestine was often considered as a moment of interior conversion. The Crusade song composed by Hartmann von Aue sometime between 1188 and 1197 begins with the following stanza: ‘Taking the cross requires clear intentions and irreproachable behaviour [...]. What is the point in wearing the cross on your clothes, if it is not in the heart?’ (V, l. 1–4). The poet, having served the world until his master’s death, which reminded him of its temporary nature, then asks permission to leave it in order to seek salvation overseas. The song is exclusively spiritual, evoking the internalisation of the values of the ‘new knight-hood’. It reflects the same religious enthusiasm for the crusader as described by Rutebeuf around 1267, debating with a sceptical, stay-at-home, sentimental, and faint-hearted ‘non-crusader’ whom he eventually man-

²⁹ Demurger, *Les Templiers*, 173–177, Cerrini, *La Révolution des templiers*, 142–171.

ages to win over. Some scholars have remarked that this song may have been ordered by King Louis when he was preparing his expedition to Tunis. Hence, if we read between the lines of the 'non-crusader's' arguments, Ruteboeuf may perhaps be allowing us a glimpse into his own personal scepticism regarding the merits of the Crusade.

In 1187, the taking of Jerusalem by Saladin troubled Western consciences. Shortly after that time Ralph Niger (*c.* 1140–*c.* 1217), canon of Lincoln, wrote a short Latin work condemning the expedition which was being planned by the more prominent Western kings to recapture the town. He argued that the internal journey towards the celestial Jerusalem was superior to the exterior reconquering of the town, criticising the massacre of Muslims who, 'despite being infidels, are still human beings' (IV, 12). Those who attempt to propagate the faith by violence, he says, transgress the commandments of that very same faith. He goes on to paraphrase Ezekiel: 'God does not wish for the death of the sinner' (18:23). The relative failure of the ensuing Crusade, despite the exceptional means put at its disposal, increased defeatist attitudes. There was general concern regarding the survival of the Eastern Crusader states. By the thirteenth century, more or less overt criticism spread against an uncertain venture which seemed destined to failure in the context of the Turk and the Mongol advances.³⁰

Shortly before the 1189 Crusade, the troubadour Peirol in a short *tenso* poem imagines a discussion with the personification of Love, who advises him to remain in the Auvergne region of France with his lady, rather than attempting to take 'the tower of David, that the Turks or the Arabs will never give up to him' (XXXI, l. 37–39). Austorc d'Aurillac, another troubadour from the Auvergne region, provocatively says he is angry against God and Our Lady, who have allowed the defeat of Al-Mansura (1250), almost leading him to embrace Islam (l. 20–24). In 1265, in another Occitan *sirventes*, the Templar knight Ricau Bonomel expresses similar bitterness regarding the loss of Caesarea and Arsuf (l. 9–10). He remarks on the military advances of Islam, saying that while God has fallen asleep, Mohammed, on the other hand, helps the Mamluk Sultan Baibars (d. 1277) on to victory (l. 22–24). He complains that he might as well abandon the cross he wears, since it can no longer protect him from the Muslims (l. 1–5). These Occitan *sirventes* may perhaps have sought, by their provocation, to encourage Westerners to take up the Crusade in order to help the Eastern crusaders who were suffering such heavy losses. However, the

³⁰ Siberry, *Criticism of Crusading*.

tone of these *sirventes* is not very hopeful. Above all, they seem to express the pessimism about Crusades, which affected part of the Western Christian elites during the thirteenth century.

Criticism was also aimed at the behaviour and motivation of the crusaders who were supposed to be morally irreproachable in order to engage in armed pilgrimage or Holy War. The 27,000-line German romance, *Reinfried von Braunschweig*, which was finished around the year 1300, reflects this disappointment. Among the nine reasons which it puts forward to explain their departure, 'serving God with a pure heart' or 'suffering for Christ' are relatively less important than the other reasons: a liking for battle, a wish to travel, the winning of a lady's heart, profit, pleasure, fame (l. 14624–35), and so on. The writer of the romance clearly suggests that the crusaders' intentions were rarely as upright as they should be.

The superiority of the missionary spirit over war is clearly put forward. In his treatise on the knights written at the end of the thirteenth century, Raymond Lull certainly claims to admire the faith and the moral standards of the 'knights who go on pilgrimage to the foreign Holy Land and who, by using their weapons against the enemies of the cross, become martyrs for the exaltation of the Holy Catholic faith' (VI). Being close to the Franciscan order and strongly committed to the conversion of Muslims, Lull nevertheless still prefers the preachers. In his *Livre de contemplation*, he writes: 'I see many knights leave for the foreign Holy Land, intending to conquer it with weapons. Yet they exhaust themselves without reaching their goal. I believe, Lord, that the Holy Land should be conquered solely by the means you and your apostles employed: love, prayer, the shedding of blood and tears' (§112, 10). Criticism of the knight's immoderate use of weapons also reached the crusaders themselves. The pacific alternative of the religious mission would seem to be more effective.

From the time of their very foundation, the military orders raised the problem of the use of weapons by clerics. In this respect, they were criticised for the arrogance of their members. Their *raison d'être* was increasingly questioned as the Eastern Crusader states were reduced to insignificance. Around 1180, after having remarked upon the incongruity of the monastic sword, Walter Map railed against the luxury of the Templars, their greed, their arrogance, their collusion with worldly princes, their contempt for peace, and, above all, the futility of their violence which did not prevent the advance of the Muslims (I, 20). He is equally harsh in his treatment of the Hospitallers, whom he considers to have perverted their initial charisma of welcoming poor pilgrims and the charitable activities of their beginnings, in favour of cupidity and usury (I, 23). Around 1270,

the Occitan troubadour, Guillaume d'Hautpol, rebukes the soldier monks by picking up the same themes of wickedness, pride, and greed which betray their founders' spirit (l. 49–56). Shortly before the fall of the last crusader bastions in Palestine, the loss of prestige of the military orders was palpably clear. It facilitated the dissolution of the Templars in 1312 by Pope Clement V at the request of King Philip IV of France.

The internalisation of persuasive arguments?

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, numerous texts were addressed to the knights in an attempt to reduce their violence. The examples we have just analysed are taken from historiography, homiletics, and moral treatises. They reveal the efforts undertaken by clerical thinkers to pacify the warrior aristocracy in the West and to deflect its military might towards the East. The considerable number of such examples is in itself sufficient proof of a period of predication development directed towards the laity and supported by a growing network of schools. Because of their double pastoral and intellectual duty, clerics undeniably demonstrate their desire to offer the knights a strict framework within which to use their weapons, to make the knights more obedient towards the king and more respectful of public institutions, to regulate the arbitrary nature of lordly levying and to reduce their lavish spending.³¹

The norms for this new discipline stemmed from ancient philosophy with its sense of the common good and its ideas on the duties of virtuous government in the service of the state. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century thinkers adapted these ideas from an evangelical perspective. They believed that charity, rather than family relations or feudality, should regulate social networks within a church congregation made up of all those who were baptised.³² Borne by the sacraments, this idea was based on the action of grace on the soul, and on personal conversion leading to the Communion of Saints. Justice and peace would thus eventually rule over Christendom, even if only in the End Times.

³¹ 'The *litterati* [...] believed that their most urgent task was to convert the homes of the nobility which were the breeding ground for *potentes* and *milites*', Duby, 'Les Trois ordres', 721. 'Writers, readers, professors and students reached a new model consensus, based on authority, to discipline Christians', Bisson, *The Crisis*, 445. 'The clerics' and the monks' preaching attempted to reduce and appease conflict between Christians', Barthélemy, *La Chevalerie*, 231.

³² Guerreau-Jalabert, '*Spiritus et caritas*: le baptême dans la société médiévale'.

The cathedral schools, and subsequently the universities, developed the ideal model of an organic and hierarchical world in which the knights would be the hands of the prince, the latter being the head of the social body whose soul was none other than the clergy. In the service of society, the knights would thus be subjected to a higher authority. Such authority implied restrictions in the practice of coercive power, with the king retaining an overall monopoly. This implied that the knights were to protect and defend, rather than exploit, the poor—an ideal which was most certainly too lofty for the members of a dominant warrior caste who were contemptuous of the lower classes and more accustomed to imposing themselves with weapons. According to this model, only ascetic combat (much superior to battle against tangible enemies), penance, and frequent confession and communion would allow the knights to fully assume the duties which they solemnly accepted on the day of their dubbing. Inner peace, to be obtained only through arduous struggle against their own passions, was the prerequisite for exterior peace.

Texts dealing directly with the knights were written by clerics who themselves defined their subject, assigning a social role to the knights and imposing on them an ethical code with an undeniably Christian tone. This tone becomes almost clerical in the words of Peter of Blois: 'If they were true knights, and if they knew their knightly duties, they would be more deferential towards the clerics'. He wrote these words in 1184, at the beginning of a letter in which he complained about the disdain of some nobles he knew against priesthood (ep. 94). His remonstrations were part of a much wider catechistic programme aimed specifically at the knights, whose professional vices Peter in this case intentionally rebuked. Viewed through the somewhat distorting prism of the overwhelmingly clerical documentation of that period, it nevertheless does not seem incongruous to define knighthood as a Christian institution.³³ This, at any rate, was the ideal which was designated by the intellectuals, and more specifically by intellectual priests, of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

But how does this view stand up to the test of historical reality? Did the knights learn their lesson? Did they assimilate the advice of their uncles, brothers, and cousins who had entered the orders? Did listening to sermons, Grail romances, or lives of warrior saints change their behaviour? To come to a deeper understanding of knighthood it is essential to answer these questions, but this is, of course, a difficult and perhaps im-

³³ 'The knighthood became the Christian form of the military station', Vauchez, *La Spiritualité du Moyen Âge occidental*, 63.

possible task. Since the 1980s, a handful of historians have questioned the archetypal view of a Christian knighthood profoundly influenced by evangelical values and ecclesiastical liturgy. These historians consider the religious element in the ceremony of dubbing to be superficial, having played no role whatsoever in the original ritual.³⁴ They also express scepticism regarding the pacifying potential of the message of 'the Church whose injunctions are in fact rarely followed'.³⁵ Conversely, they insist on the internal solidarity within the warrior caste, which produced its own norms internally, and without any clerical intervention, which tempered brutality on the battlefield and beyond. In their wars, the nobles spared each other almost of their own accord. A 'code of secular values' might in itself have sufficed to impose respect for the life and physical well-being of vanquished foes of the same social caste as themselves, thereby reducing the level of killing and wounding.³⁶

One of the decisive contributions of recent historiography is the astute deconstruction of the workings of conflict among the nobility. Lords regularly took advantage of their perfectly planned conflicts in order to renegotiate their power relations, not only with their neighbours but also with the king, duke, or count. Two forms in particular, the settling of scores and the settling of conflicts, occurred constantly as an integral part of this form of social organisation, with revenge immediately leading to material compensation and a temporary truce. According to some mediaevalists, such settlements among friends did more to reduce tensions, and the potential complications of such tensions, than any pastoral guidance. The fear of eternal damnation hardly played a role in such conciliation, because, taking advantage of their 'independent and lay piety',³⁷ the knights had reached direct agreement with God, without any priestly intervention, for the forgiveness of their violence and plunder. If they felt the need to be more involved with the Church, a few alms would suffice to buy approval from the monks, who after all were specialists in prayers. Indeed, such gifts 'dispensed the knights from reforming their ways'.³⁸ They could save their souls without having to pay a heavy price.

The conclusions of those historians who play down the influence of ecclesiastical action on the ways of the knightly aristocracy are based on a

³⁴ Keen, *Chivalry*, 64–82.

³⁵ Barthélemy, 'La chevalerie en perspective historique', 2.

³⁶ Gillingham, '1066 and the Introduction of Chivalry into England', 209.

³⁷ Kaeuper, *Chivalry and Violence in Medieval Europe*, 86–87.

³⁸ Barthélemy, *La Chevalerie, de la Germanie à la France du XIII^e siècle*, 244.

twofold method. Firstly, this method ‘deconstructs’ mediaeval texts, whose authors, most of whom were clerics, perceived historical reality from the position of their moral categories, religious beliefs, and theological learning. Secondly, it draws on the findings of comparative anthropology, which has analysed the outbreak and resolution of cycles of violence in the Middle Ages in the light of other non-literate, non-Christian societies with no established state. The two approaches have proved rewarding, provided that they observe the framework imposed by source analysis and, as well, that they take into account the specific nature of twelfth- and thirteenth-century societies, since these were more distant from so-called primitive peoples than is sometimes appreciated. The conclusions of this research at any rate provide a valuable corrective to the naive image of the ‘fearless and upright’ knight, steeped in piety, conveyed by a certain school of romantic historiography. These conclusions show that, at all times and in all places, warrior castes came to agreements which safeguarded their material interests and social predominance.

Anthropological theories on mediaeval conflict settlement have no compunction in adopting a more old-fashioned, more shifting, and more fluid view of chivalry. In particular, the period between 1170 and 1220 was a watershed in the process of the Christianization of the knights, at a time when their moral and religious codes became fixed, with priests becoming involved in the rite of dubbing. The term *militia* began to take on a strong ethical connotation and the knights’ order and profession reminded a number of thinkers of their priestly equivalents.³⁹ The period in question also coincided with a strengthening of monarchy, which managed to establish its domination, forcing the aristocratic nobility to its service. The ministerial authority of chivalry, whose *raison d’être* was claimed to be none other than the pursuit of the common good as sought after by the king, became a constant theme for John of Salisbury and the other theorists of the two swords (symbolizing the secular and spiritual powers). At the royal court, the clerics’ writings were not simply of an administrative nature, recording royal rights in favour of state finances and detrimental to independent lordships. Their treatises and letters also set forth political philosophy and legal doctrine, through which the clerks aimed to subjugate the lords, and their knights, to princely authority. Henceforth, if there was any violence on the part of the nobility, it had to be legitimate, and totally controlled by the monopoly of the crown.

³⁹ Crouch, *The Birth of Nobility*, 29, 38, 80–89, Flori, *Chevaliers et chevalerie*, 203–234.

Around 1200, the essentially clerical and scholastic notion of the knights' submission to God and to a king who was, in the temporal domain at least, God's representative on earth began to be put into practice. From the end of the twelfth century on, firstly in England and then in France and the other Western kingdoms, the nobility were obliged to follow the custom of paying homage and fealty to the newly crowned monarch. The wealth of their fiefs, duly recorded by the princely administration, determined the number of armed men they were obliged to contribute to the royal army. But such regimentation was apparently insufficient to restrict the use of arms to the forty days of the year during which the knights were supposed to serve their prince in military expeditions against neighbouring kingdoms or on Crusade. For several centuries, the knights continued to do battle outside any regulated framework. Proof of this may be found in the popularity of the tradition of duelling among the nobility of the French *Ancien Régime*. Worse still, rebellion against royal power became second nature to many lords. The clerics may have emphasised the sacred nature of the coronation ritual, reminding the rebels of the Old Testament punishment: 'Do not touch my anointed ones!' (1 Chronicles 16:22, Psalms 105:15) and going to great lengths to develop the knights' awareness of the divine nature of royalty. But while part of the knighthood was enrolled in the royal army, many continued to resist the king.

In spite of repeated revolts against royalty and incessant private wars, the order of knighthood was brought progressively within the realm of the burgeoning states of the thirteenth century. The spread of reading and writing among the elite actually contributed to the increased power of the king, who was able to persuade literate knights to work in his administrative service. While the income they enjoyed from their estates may have diminished due to royal taxation, their earnings at court served to offset this loss of income. In addition to their pragmatic writing abilities, the weapon-handling skills of these disciplined knights in royal service was a considerable asset for the affirmation of royal authority. The clerics were not merely educators, teaching noble children how to read and write and facilitating their entry into the royal palaces through bookish knowledge. They also contributed to the triumph of the idea, and of the bureaucratic foundations, of a powerful monarchy, with the knights becoming its obedient hands. By calling them to order through a greater reflection on the nature of the hierarchy of power in large part inspired by the Bible and the Church Fathers, the clerics undoubtedly succeeded in amending the knights' behaviour, making them more obedient and better disciplined.

Clerical influence on the pacification of the aristocracy was not limited to their propaganda in favour of a strong monarchy. It was of a more profound and spiritual nature and even affected the warriors' moral conscience. It seems obvious that the new twelfth- and thirteenth-century pastoral teachings modified the piety of the Western elite. Closer to Christ's humanity, the predication movement insisted on charity towards one's neighbour, especially in illness and poverty. Since they placed the experience of poverty at the heart of their lives, the mendicant orders saw alms completely differently from a lord who on his death bed gave away a handful of his possessions to a monastery founded by his forbears.⁴⁰ The increased spread of preaching also affected the knights, making them more aware of the ethics which were supposed to govern their profession. Confession, at least once a year, was made obligatory. Works on penance, such as Alain de Lille's *Liber pœnitentialis*, explored more complex moral issues. This new pastoral framework coincided with an increasing literacy on the part of the nobility, whose tutors or teachers were members of the clergy. Their teaching was generally of a moral or doctrinal nature. This is why the Church was able to play a significant role in reducing the violence of the aristocrats, or, to use the terminology employed by the mediæval clerics, in reducing their pride, anger, and greed. From the end of the twelfth century at least, chivalry became inextricably linked with Christianity. This, then, raises the question of whether the same was true also for courtliness.

⁴⁰ Vauchez, *François d'Assise*, 85–90, 173–177, 461–462.

MANNERS: MASTERING MOVEMENT AND SPEECH

In his allegorical treatise *Roman des ailes*, written around 1200, Raoul de Hodenc (d. 1234), probably a Picard jongleur, lists the qualities or 'feathers' of the two 'wings' of the knighthood: generosity and courtliness. In the prologue he claims: 'The knighthood is the fountain of all courtliness that will be extinguished by no one. Courtliness stems from God and is possessed by the knights [...]. It only develops in the knights' fief' (l. 12–15, 23–24). Created by God, courtliness is thus inextricably linked to the knighthood, conferring upon them forms of behaviour which distinguish them from the vulgar. In the prologue to his *Knight with the Lion*, Chrétien de Troyes declares quite bluntly: 'For it seems to me that a courtly person, even when dead, is preferable to a villein who is alive' (l. 31–32). During his life, vileness implied the rank of serf as much as the crude manners of rusticity (which was the antonym of civility or urbanity). In Latin, *curialitas*, *civilitas*, or *urbanitas* thus corresponded to *cortésie* or *cortesia* in Romance languages. Like chivalry, courtliness was a code of conduct which facilitated understanding and harmony among the lay nobility, although in a different context to that of armed conflict.

Teaching ('Ensenhamen') *to a Lady* (c. 1150), by the troubadour Garin lo Brun, proposes the following definition: 'Courtliness is speaking and acting so well that others are forced to love you. It protects you from their dislike. The person who refuses to insult, who avoids boring other people, and who does that which pleases others, becomes courteous [...]. Courtliness means being well-dressed and welcoming other people with kindness, honouring them, and speaking to them pleasantly' (l. 429–35, 457–60). This definition implies a worldly civility which facilitates social exchange and attracts esteem from others. Being liked by others was an objective which was ardently sought after. At the end of the twelfth century, in his *Ensenhamen*, the troubadour Arnaut de Mareuil gives explicit advice: 'You must do and say things that will bring you honour and gratitude from better people' (l. 13–16). The quest for glory and recognition from the elite were thus the two pillars of Arnaut's categorical imperative. The courteous skills that Arnaut wished to disseminate are summarised as 'the way in which a person desirous of obtaining praise should behave' (l. 37–38).

Since courtliness may be generally summed up as pleasing others, it excluded any form of aggressive behaviour, particularly of a verbal nature. At the same time, it limited frankness or spontaneity, including any expression of disagreement. It also precluded any form of excess which

might upset other people. By all these means it prevented, or at least tempered or masked, conflict. In similar vein, Garin lo Brun recommends 'confiding in those who are able to remain moderate in all circumstances' (l. 572–4). In Garin's time, courtliness involved level-headedness, moderation, and gentleness. It therefore implied strict self-control to ensure that behaviour was constantly appropriate: the right words and the right actions. Wace declares that King Arthur, the main character of his *Roman de Brut*, 'succeeded in eliciting courteous service because he knew how to control himself in noble fashion' (l. 9027–8). Thus, in Wace's words, composure, in the sense of self-control in front of others, became synonymous with aristocratic behaviour. It was through this composure that Arthur obtained the esteem of those who were close to him. Seeking to please him in return, they thereby became courteous.

The pursuit of honour and aristocratic recognition was an essential characteristic of courtliness, but did not belong to it exclusively, for it was also to be found in chivalry, which certainly shared this characteristic. In his *Four Ages of Man*, Philip of Novara has no hesitation in writing that 'the young noble, the knight, and other armed people must force themselves to acquire honour and to become famous for their temporal possessions, for the wealth and inheritance which maintain their lifestyle' (§66). He also notes that many knights who left a mark on collective memory did so only because poets wrote down and sang of their exploits (§17). The *Four Ages* is a work of mature age, characterised by a moralising tone. Yet Philip of Novara has no hesitation in designating honour as the ultimate goal of chivalry. On this point, which he considers essential, Philip seems to diverge from the ecclesiastical condemnation of the warriors' pride and vainglory. His literacy and legal knowledge did not make Philip one of the rigorist clerics. As a knight, he recognised reputation, and the songs which spread reputation, as being of supreme value. When it comes to honour, his discourse on the knights is close to the Occitan *Ensenhamens*.

Even if they share a common objective—obtaining worldly glory for the knights, and reforming aristocratic ways for the clerics—chivalry and courtliness should not be confused. Arnaut de Mareuil remarks on how difficult it is for a knight to possess both at the same time: 'Some are good warriors, others good Amphitryon; some are gifted at serving, others at arming troops; some are good on horseback, others are good courtiers. All these qualities are rarely found together' (l. 232–40). It is true that chivalry and courtliness had very different fields of application. Chivalry was to war what courtliness was to peace. The former was learnt and practised

on the battlefield, the latter at court. The former was unknown to the clerics who were forbidden from carrying weapons, while the latter influenced all clerics who spent time in the higher circles of power. As teachers of noble children, the tutors, who were often, if not exclusively tonsured, were duty bound to transmit courtliness to them as well as literary culture and moral values. Thus, around 1075, the monk Onulf von Speyer opens his rhetorical treatise with a declaration of the principles in which letters, morals, and manners come together: 'The art of rhetoric encourages the adoption of elegant manners, of norms of behaviour, and of dignified existence' (p. 369). The pedagogues were therefore the vectors of aristocratic civility.

In his *Gesta Danorum* ('Deeds of the Danes', 1186–1208), Saxo Grammaticus describes how displeased Canute the Great (995–1035) was by the brutality of his men: 'More weighty of muscle than grave in manner; and though they behaved themselves gloriously in war, they had only a dim perception of the ways appropriate to peacetime' (10.18.1). Since 'many of them, tied to pernicious habits, would bring violence and squabbling into the court itself', the king ordered Opo of Seeland to impose discipline upon them. 'And in order to form an alliance between courteous affability and their boldness, he imbued the most courageous knights with the most lovely manner of conduct' (10.18.3). From the oral and written sources available to him, the grammarian Saxo told an old anecdote about the military discipline imposed in former days, harshly and by force, on Canute's army. Writing at the beginning of the thirteenth century, Saxo chose nonetheless to underline the sophisticated and urban behaviour adopted by the wildest warriors, not by military discipline, but thanks to the pedagogical talents of Opo, the kindly teacher who brought them from bestiality back to humanity.⁴¹ In point of fact, Saxo's discourse reflects the vision of a clerical grammarian among the entourage of the bishop of Lund around the year 1200, rather than the reality of Danish warriors around the year 1000 (of which Saxo himself had no awareness).

Around the year 1210, Master Gottfried von Strassburg relates a similar story to that concerning Canute's soldiers but of an individual rather than a collective nature. At the beginning of the German verse *Tristan*, the knight Rivalin (the hero's father) is described as brave, strong, and loyal, but also excessive, overconfident, and vengeful, being incapable of pardon and always bent on revenge (l. 245–80). As a young man, his impetuosity and overblown sense of honour drove him to attack his feudal lord only three

⁴¹ Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*, 136–137.

years after having been dubbed. Yet after this he decided to travel to King Mark's court 'to acquire knightly qualities and to polish his manners' (l. 458–9). Once there, he discovered that he could indeed improve his manners abroad (l. 461), in a court where Mark led a life of perfect courtliness (l. 500). He even married the king's sister, Blanche fleur, who gives birth to their son Tristan, the incarnation of grace, elegance, and manners. The young and single Rivalin was thus adopted into the very family which civilised him, teaching him how to temper the fiery violence of his youth. Here the young man's passage from *juvenis* to adulthood, becoming a *senior* through marriage, appears synonymous with courtliness.

Courteous clerics

This brings us to the question of whether courtliness was a secular or a religious value in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, whether it appeared spontaneously or through scholarly thinking, whether it was knightly or clerical. C. S. Jaeger, the most respected contemporary specialist on the subject, suggests that, from the tenth century onwards, the bishops of the entourage of the German emperor provided one of the first mediaeval models for the ideal of courtesy. These educated prelates followed the humanist tradition of Cicero and Seneca rather than the episcopal obligations set out in the *Regula pastoralis* ('Pastoral rule') of Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604). They spread the notion of a form of government which would enhance the prestige of 'gentlemen' statesmen. The 'cult of virtues' advocated by ancient philosophers and embodied by the Carolingian and Ottonian episcopate would appear to have made its way into Platonist teaching in the cathedral schools and, from there, into knightly courtliness. This thesis may perhaps insist too heavily on the role of the episcopate and its classical background in a civilising process, which in fact had many different and complex causes. It does, however, emphasise the undeniable role of the bishops, priests, and clerical tutors in the education of the aristocracy. In addition, it establishes a close link between bookish learning and the civilising of mores.

Although of a secular nature, courteous values had greater or less Christian overtones in the texts, depending on the authors. Two English chronicles from the first half of the fourteenth century describe the astonishment expressed by both Henry III and the earl of Gloucester when faced with the elegant behaviour of Robert Grosseteste (d. 1253, professor at Oxford and bishop of Lincoln), despite his humble family background.

The bishop explained that he had refined his manners by imitating the models of prudence, modesty, and generosity which he had discovered in the Bible. He asserted that he had lived spiritually at the court of David and Solomon, who were much superior to the kings of England. The anecdote is intended above all as a lesson, but it is nevertheless revealing as regards the clerics' knowledge and application of Scripture. The sapiential books of the Old Testament set out a very practical set of morals, similar in many respects to Stoic teaching. Sirach, in particular, even contains instructions on how to behave at banquets (Sir 31–32).⁴² The twelfth- and thirteenth-century moralists who explored the question of *good manners* adopted such biblical passages, in the same way that they drew from the ancient philosophers or took inspiration from the behaviour they observed around them.

The intellectuals who spread such ideas on bearing and manners were sometimes the very same preachers who were profoundly committed to moral and religious reform of the laity. One such was Alain de Lille, who in his *Complaint by Nature* (1160–1170) personifies Temperance as a matron of staid gait who recommends restrained words, prudent action, modest dress, strict movement, and moderate eating and drinking. Close on her heels came Generosity, a woman of incomparable beauty, whose dress was characterised by its courtliness (*curialitas*). Another of his works, *Anticlaudianus* (1182–1183), depicts Modesty as providing men with measured attitudes, softening their words, holding their senses in check, and moderating their behaviour. As for their acts, Modesty recommends them adopting a happy medium, as far from a lustful folly as it is from a rigorist contempt to other people. In his analysis of these passages, the historian Jean-Claude Schmitt notes 'clerical ideology's rising receptiveness, in urban areas, to the values being increasingly vigorously proclaimed by the lay aristocracy during this period'.⁴³ Neither Alain de Lille nor any other scholars remained indifferent to the increased refinement that they observed at the royal court, and also in lordly castles and even in bourgeois mansions. Their thinking even brought them to include this phenomenon into the wider ethical system which they set about to establish in the light of the New Testament and with the help of ancient philosophy.

The tonsured intellectuals actively spread courteous values. The troubadour Arnaut de Mareuil was, according to his *vida* (VII), 'a cleric from a poor family', who travelled from court to court to sing. He left his *En-*

⁴² Orme, *From Childhood to Chivalry*, 135.

⁴³ Schmitt, *La Raison des gestes*, 202.

senhamen, which contains vague moral precepts useful for 'leading a courteous life' (l. 55). He begins with a list of masters who are to be imitated: Solomon, Plato, Virgil, Homer, Porphyry, and 'so many other doctors'. The list includes the sapiential books of the Bible, but also the ancient Greek and Roman poets and philosophers, and provides a revealing example of the way in which bookish knowledge embraced the theme of courtliness. The clerics who possessed such knowledge in this way assumed a civilising role, teaching the courtliness which they claimed themselves to embody. In subsequent lines, Arnaut establishes a parallel between the 'clergy' and courtliness: 'The clerics, thanks to whom we may always tell right from wrong, are possessed of the following merits: some of them have got knowledge (*clercia*, in Occitan both science and clergy), others are courteous; some of them provide pleasant conversation, others are noble through their deeds; some of them are very kind, others are very generous' (l. 261–70).

The dual nature of courtliness (practical and knowledgeable, lay and religious) is explicitly mentioned at the end of the twelfth century by clerics from the English court who considered courtliness as a set of virtues. Around 1184, the biblical exegete Herbert of Bosham raised the topic in relation to Thomas Becket's educational programme as reflected in the latter's role as tutor to the son of Henry II and to other sons of the high-ranking Anglo-Norman aristocracy. Herbert wrote a *Life* which expressed admiration for the archbishop of Canterbury, whom he followed into exile after having served him for many years at the English court. In this biography, Herbert suggests the dual existence of a human and a supernatural grace, which the saint himself embodies and which he also attempts to inculcate into his princely pupils: 'On the one hand, a benevolence (*benignitas*) which is pleasing to the world, and, on the other hand, a goodness (*bonitas*) which pleases the heavens' (II, 1). If we are to believe another Latin *Life* of Thomas written by his secretary, William Fitz Stephen, in 1173 or 1174, Herbert of Bosham also knew how to shine in society: 'He was tall and good looking. In addition, he dressed splendidly, wearing a tunic and cloak of green Auxerre cloth which hung over his shoulders in German fashion, falling to his heels, and worn elegantly for the occasion'. According to Fitz Stephen, Herbert's rhetoric was equally brilliant: he claims that Herbert was widely considered to be a master of witticism who successfully ridiculed Becket's opponents and elicited admiration from the nobility (§97). He was therefore an example of a cleric who had perfectly assimilated courtly manners. His outward manner, careful appearance, and intellectual vivacity made him the perfect courtier.

But Herbert of Bosham was merely following his master's example. He claims that the young Thomas Becket possessed 'a polished, urban, benevolent grace which was soft and sociable, and which invited others to admire him—a quality more pleasing to the world than to God' (II, 1). He also describes him many years later, in 1164, when he was fleeing *incognito* from England. Disguised as a monk, he entered an inn with his companions in exile, taking the last place left at the table. The innkeeper nevertheless remarked on his 'way of eating and passing food'. 'He observed his general bearing and his movements, his tall and noble stature, his wide forehead and his strict appearance, his good-looking, oblong face, the shape of his long hands, and the harmonious and almost exquisite way he moved them' (IV, 4). The innkeeper deduced that he must be 'a great man'—probably the archbishop of Canterbury. Bosham's anecdote was clearly inspired by scenes of the miraculous recognition of saints specific to the hagiographical genre. It also dwells on Becket's good manners, in accordance with the episcopal model of courtliness.⁴⁴ His distinction shines through his monastic appearance. There is nothing unnatural about this distinction, which is quite effortless and naturally cultivated. It is made up of what the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has described as the 'thousand tiny details which make up the 'je-ne-sais-quoi' and the delicate perfection of good manners', an old, worldly, and precocious acquiring of taste, far removed from the parvenu's clumsy and laborious pedantry.⁴⁵ It was this style, in the sense of both social superiority and distinction, which led Henry II to entrust Becket with his children's education and also, perhaps, with the government of his court.

The educational programme devised by Becket, and described by Bosham as kind and benevolent, attempted to inculcate detachment, a desire to serve others, and generosity. The knight was to ban any malice or selfishness in his relations with others. In the same way that he now checked his violence on the battlefield, he learnt to control his ambition and desire, particularly at court. The palace or the castle was indeed a place of power, generating tensions, plotting and scheming. Collective discipline helped to overcome, or at least to reduce such tendencies. Good manners were an essential precondition for courtly cohabitation. They were of course part of a classical and humanist tradition which was revived by the twelfth-century renaissance. The clerics who promoted such manners during that era nevertheless conceived of them from a theological

⁴⁴ Jaeger, *The Envy of Angels*, 298.

⁴⁵ *La Distinction: critique sociale du jugement*, 77.

perspective. On this point, as on so many others, they were unable to depart from their mental processes, from the patterns of their conception of social facts as imposed by their scholastic training. This is why, in their writings, divine help always assists the courtier who, dissatisfied with 'benevolence' as a form of justice through which each person may obtain his just rewards, wishes to show 'goodness' or charity—a virtue infused by God—towards other courtiers.

Thomas Becket's *eminence grise*, John of Salisbury, spends a whole chapter of his *Policraticus* demonstrating that there are excellent rules of civility in the Gospels (VIII, 9). To support this claim he quotes the rules of priority at banquets decreed by Christ himself (Luke 14:8–10). He then launches into a long demonstration of the benefits of moderation and temperance at table, borrowing his examples and arguments equally from the Bible and from ancient writers and philosophers. John indeed asserts that as regards good manners, he cannot 'separate that which stems from religion, from that which stems from civility (*civilitas*), for there is nothing more urbane than persevering in virtue'. In his *Metalogicon*, he declares that morals bestow 'the grace of beauty' (I, 24), in other words, good manners. In his writing, ethics and aesthetics come together. The same sensibility is apparent in *Education of a Prince*, written by Gerald of Wales, who was, like Salisbury, a courtier of the Angevin kings of England. In between quoting the Gospel of John and Horace's letters, he asserts that 'the beauty of mores is above all useful and suitable for governing one's own life' (I, 1). Such Christian humanism combining ancient ethics and biblical morals pervaded the thinking of those clerics trained at the cathedral schools. A century later, it was to find its most perfect expression in the axiom through which Thomas Aquinas harmonised the natural and the supernatural order: 'Grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it' (*Gratia non tollit naturam sed perficit*, Ia, q. 1, a. 8, ad 2).

John of Salisbury's exegesis expresses the fusion between the human and the divine, but perhaps also between courtliness and 'clergy' (in mediæval French, *clergie*). The latter must be conceived of both as a form of literary knowledge and as good manners. Peter of Blois, another of Henry II's courtiers, clearly states that bookish knowledge stems from civility: 'The scholars' work, although useless for the salvation of souls, contains worldly honesty and secular innocence' (ep. 139). As we are reminded in the prologue to the *Romance of Troy* by Benoît de Sainte-Maure (a cleric from the Touraine region of France who also profited from Henry II's generosity), without the philosophers' books and without the seven arts, we would live like animals, for he who possesses more knowledge teaches, and

does, more good (l. 1–31). The Catalan troubadour Ramon Vidal de Besalu is still more direct in a passage from his long moral poem *Abril issi' e mays intrava*, written around 1213. In this poem he remonstrates against false scholars who foolishly think they shine at court merely because they display knowledge which they do not in fact possess: 'Nature makes the villein, as knowledge (*saber*) makes the well-educated man [*ensenhat*]' (l. 1020–1). Between 1170 and 1180, Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan, another troubadour and courtier of the viscount of Gascony, voiced a similar opinion when he expressed the wish that the ideal squire be 'courteous, well-educated [*ensenhat*], and well-spoken [*ben emparaulat*]' (l. 377–8). In the twelfth century, as today, education was a dual notion. It ambiguously designated both the cumulating of bookish learning and norms of behaviour. Letters were important in the civilising of manners.

Instructional books on civility

The impact of the twelfth-century cultural revival on manners took concrete form in their written codification. It was during this period that instructional books on civility were written for the first time in the Western world, setting out rules on how to speak, how to express respect towards superiors, how to eat, how to behave, or how to dress.⁴⁶ Their novelty lay in the precision with which they described regulated movements and, for some of these works, in the systematic nature of the classification they provided.

Latin antiquity has also left us with treatises on ethics which are of a rather general nature. One example is the *Distichs of Cato*, a short compilation of Stoic maxims in hexametric verse written by the author Dionysius Cato (third to fourth centuries). The compilation provides a mixture of abstract reflections and more practical advice on family and social life and family economics. It was commonly used during the Middle Ages to help perfect children's Latin grammar. During the twelfth century, there were at least six French translations of the work, three of them in England and three on the Continent. Equally popular was the *Formula vitæ honestæ*, written by Martin (c. 520–580), archbishop of Braga, based on Seneca's work. Like the *Distichs*, which it resembles, the *Formula vitæ honestæ* was translated many times. The tone of these two works also recalls

⁴⁶ The mass of this literature is presented in Roussel, 'Le legs de la rose: modèles et préceptes de la sociabilité médiévale', 3–24, and in Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtliness*, 16–44, 149–152.

the *Carmen ad Astrolabium Astrolabum* ('Advice to Astrolabe'), a sort of moral testament that Peter Abelard wrote for his son in 1141–1142, but which was much less widely read.

Some monastic rules from the early Middle Ages refer directly to daily activities, and indeed to a much greater extent than do the treatises inspired by the Stoics. The reasons are clear enough. Firstly, clearly defined norms helped avoid the tensions which might arise from living side by side in a small community. In addition, the rule of Saint Benedict (c. 480–547), the most widespread of the rules, was characterised by its moderation in all aspects of daily life. Lastly, from a more ascetic perspective the strict observance of a code helped discipline the monks' will. The three objectives aimed at by monastic rules—facilitating social co-existence, adopting moderate behaviour, and controlling one's own emotions—were similar to worldly courtliness. Yet the differences sometimes appear significant. On the one hand, the rule explicitly seeks harmony between the monk's internal life and external behaviour, between the mind and the body, between appearance and reality. Codes of courtliness, on the other hand, advocated rather the masking of emotions, thoughts and moods, partly in order not to vex other people but also in order to put forward an image of oneself in accordance with aristocratic models of behaviour, with the end to better one's reputation.⁴⁷ However, this difference did not prevent the instructions of the Benedictine rule on table manners, hospitality, or moderation in speech from being reproduced in instruction books on civility intended for lay people.

The first precise presentation of manners written for the nobility was probably Petrus Alphonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis*, written shortly before 1140. The author, who presents himself as a father educating his son by means of edifying fables of Oriental origin, devotes, for example, several paragraphs on 'how to eat' (XXVI, 8–13). The *De Institutione novitiorum* ('Instruction of Novices'), written c. 1141 by Hugh of Saint Victor (c. 1096–1141), an Augustine canon and a teacher in the Parisian schools, was also very popular, with 172 manuscripts preserved to this day, some of them outside the cloister, even if only for preaching purposes. The Dominican Vincent of Beauvais, a royal tutor and librarian, provides a French translation of this work in his *Miroir Historial*. The *De institutione novitiorum* thus brings us back to the monastic milieu. Its prologue mentions 'a science through which one attains discipline, a discipline through

⁴⁷ Schnell, 'Wer sieht das Unsichtbare? *Homo exterior* und *Homo interior* in monastischen und laikalen Erziehungsschriften'.

which one attains goodness, and a goodness through which one attains beatific vision'. Further on, discipline is defined as 'good and honest behaviour', 'ordered movement of all one's limbs, and decent attitudes in all bearing and activity' (X). The happy medium between grace and severity is to be maintained in bearing, movement, speech, and while eating.

The *Facetus* genre is ostensibly destined for lay people. The name in Latin covers the following semantic field: 'pleasant, cheerful, elegant, amenable, polite, delicate'. This short work was, in its first version, written during the 1150s with the objective of completing the *Distichs*. Over a third of its precepts nevertheless deal with good manners. At the end of the twelfth century, the *Facetus* was elaborated into a longer Latin version with the inclusion of advice from Ovid on how to seduce a woman, how to keep her, and how to get rid of her. This too led to several French translations. Lastly, Daniel Beccles' *Urbanus Magnus* (c. 1180) in 3,000 hexameters was even more voluminous. Originally from Suffolk, Beccles writes at the end of his work that he is continuing the teachings of Henry II of England, which may indicate that it was written at the court of one of the most culturally active kings in the western world.⁴⁸ In virtuoso Latin, which could hardly be expected from a lay person, Beccles covers all the rules of social behaviour in extremely precise detail. Different in form are the short texts solely devoted to table manners from the end of the twelfth century onwards. The longest of these was the 440-hexameter *Phagifacetus* written by Reiner the German, who may have been the Duke of Thuringia's protonotary. Three other texts must also be mentioned because of their popularity: the short anonymous poem *Quisquis es in mensa* ('Whoever You May Be at Table'), written in twenty-three Leonine hexameters; the section devoted to table manners in *Morale scolarium* ('Morals of School Pupils') (IX) by the grammarian John of Garland (c. 1190–1252); and Robert Grosseteste's *Stans puer ad mensam* ('The Child at Table'). The latter comprises just over fifty lines, a similar length to several other short works written on the same topic during that period. Lastly, it should be noted that as good teachers these Latin authors tended to favour poetry over prose, since the former facilitated memorisation.

Occitan *Ensenhamens* (*Teachings*) are worthy of particular attention, if only for their relatively early appearance. The oldest among them has been attributed to Garin lo Brun, a lord from the Gévaudan and southern Auvergne region who is known to have died before 1162. His 649-hexameter '*Ensenhamen* to a lady' is therefore the oldest treatise on good

⁴⁸ Bartlett, *England under the Norman and Angevin Kings*, 583.

manners written in the vernacular. In addition to beauty, appearance, and graceful gait, a woman must entertain her relations with good humour, amiability, and good conversation, while discouraging overly eager men who might ruin her reputation, considered by the troubadour author to be of supreme value. Thirty or so years later, between 1170 and 1180, Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan in his *Ensenhamen* delivered a similar moral to a young knight discouraged by the procrastinations of the lady he was attempting to win over. At the end of the text Arnaut, the experienced master, listed his own conquests in Don Juan style, suggesting that careful dress, worthy servants, generosity, honesty, and self-control should all help to create a positive image for his disciple, thereby attracting female esteem. Between 1289 and 1295, Amanieu de Sescas, a Gascon or Catalan troubadour, provided two *Ensenhamens*, one for ladies' companions and another for squires (young noblemen who were supposed to be initiated into courtliness through a period of service under a high-ranking person). To the four above-mentioned works, which list very precise rules of behaviour, we might add the more general *Abril issi' e mays intrava* by Raimon Vidal de Bezaudun, and a short didactic verse *Ensenhamen* by Arnaut de Mareuil.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the appearance and proliferation of treatises on good manners is one of the most distinctive features of courtliness. This didactic literature alternated between compiling abstract aphorisms on practical ethics and listing concrete rules to be observed in dress, social exchange, or at table. The latter genre, which was unknown to the Greeks or the Romans, was a novel development in the western world. Its didactic nature is evident in the commonly adopted convention of a dialogue between father and son or between master and pupil. Such literary productions are also relevant proofs of increased literacy among the nobility, since the instructional books on civility were also used as a medium for learning reading and Latin. In accordance with the attitudes of the period, the tutor was bound, first and foremost, to pass on moral training to the child.

Clothing and attire

Manuals on good manners emphasize personal cleanliness, beginning with personal hygiene. 'Your teeth, eyes, and hands should be washed and rinsed in the morning when getting up' (l. 451–2), says a *Facet* (the name for the French versions of *Facetus*). Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan insists

that knights' hair should be washed and cut regularly lest it become too long. Similarly, he advises against extravagant mustachios and beards, which should be trimmed regularly (l. 341–56). Women are given even more detailed instructions for cleanliness. According to Garin lo Brun, as soon as they are out of bed, they must wash their faces, after putting on a recently washed shirt (l. 201–3). Around 1250, the trouvère Robert de Blois's *Education of Women* prescribes: 'Your hands should be kept very clean, and your nails should be cut often; they must not be too long, lest they catch dirt' (l. 469–72). Amanieu de Sescas offers an extra piece of advice for maids of honour, who are supposed to 'wash arms, hands, and face before lacing up their shirts [...], to groom the head more than the rest: you should all the more embellish it as it is more visible. You should whiten your teeth every morning [...] and always have a nice, clean mirror to hand in which you can behold your face' (l. 118–39). The mirror was still a rare and precious object then, one that appeared on ladies' chambers' dressing tables only among the upper aristocracy.

Cleanliness and elegance

Just before 1274, Master Jean de Meun, in his continuation of the *Romance of the Rose*, gave women rather ironical advice about how to artificially conceal their bodily defects. For instance, they should use other women's hair to thicken their own, or else they should put it up in horn-shaped braids, dyed it with vegetable juice if need be, cover their faces in unguents—which they should thereafter hide in their chambers—and use needles to get rid of their boils and furuncles (l. 13287–30). The tongue-in-cheek tone is obviously reminiscent, albeit in a different register altogether, of the much more rigorist diatribes of preachers and moralists against make-up. One of many examples of the latter genre is the *Misery of the Human Condition* by Cardinal Lothario dei Segni, the future Pope Innocent III (d. 1216), in which he reviled an artificial process through which a vain attempt is made to circumvent Nature, the work of the Creator: 'What could be more frivolous than combing one's hair, smearing one's face with ointment, or enlarging one's eyebrows, when "charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting (Prov 31, 30)"?' (II, 40). As a case in point, his contemporary, Guillaume, canon of Grenoble, cites Dauphine Clémence-Marguerite of Burgundy (d. 1163), a most praiseworthy widow who 'could not be bothered with adorning her face, painting her lips, dressing up her hair into a high tower by means of a wig, or blackening her eyebrows. She used to abhor the make-up used by other women who

lie to themselves as they manufacture an alien face through the artificial rouge of their cheeks or the adulterous white of their faces and necks' (§5). It is the deceiving artifice that is blamed, as well as the desire to attract men. Yet the very recurrence of such statements of disapproval in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries serves to testify to the spreading use of make-up within the nobility.

Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan warns young knights to 'keep their bodies clean and adorn them with quality clothes that should be fitting, whether they be costly or not' (l. 305–8). He lays particular emphasis on size: garments should be well-adjusted to limbs, 'for brave knights should dress with great care' (l. 311–2). Amanieu de Sescas too holds the tailor's work to be of paramount importance. All things considered, second-rate or threadbare clothes are far preferable for a squire to wear than new clothes that are badly tailored or bursting apart (l. 160–83). The same idea is expressed by Ramon Vidal de Besalu, who claims that decent clothing should not be conspicuous, but that what matters most is the cut and tidiness (l. 1091–4). Lastly, Arnaut Guilhem emphasizes such details as the clasp and the cloak's fibula, which enhance elegance (l. 338–40). His paragon is the mythical Yvain, who he claims was responsible for the introduction of a number of fashions, like zibeline fur on cloaks, 'cordlets on tunics, eyelets on spurs, or buckles on shields,' thereby attracting ladies' love (l. 233–50).

According to the three troubadours' *Ensenhamens*, male elegance has more to do with the cut and tidiness of clothes, along with the accessories thrown in to enhance them, than with the cost or novelty of the materials. In their view, the service of humble tailors is preferable to purchases from wealthy cloth merchants. By no means do they consider old-fashioned clothes to be dishonourable. On that basis, could the love of old clothes, even threadbare ones, provided they are well-cut, be singled out as a feature of aristocratic distinction? Indeed, nobles have no qualms about inheriting their parents' or even their forefathers' clothes. Joinville, in his *Life of Saint Louis*, relates how he himself once rebuked Robert de Sorbon, chaplain royal, whom he considered a parvenu: 'Master Robert, I am in no wise to blame, though I do dress in green and minnever; for this dress was handed down to me from my father and mother. But you are to blame, for you are the son of villein parents, and you have laid aside their dress, and attired yourself in finer cloth than the King' (§36). Minnever was a multicoloured fur, when canon law forbade clerics—who were in theory supposed to stick to dark outfits—from wearing bright colours. Similarly, Joinville does not approve of boors, even *nouveau riche* ones,

who dress like aristocrats. The same applied in the Romano-Germanic Empire where, in around 1150, the *Kaiserchronik* mentions legislation, allegedly Charlemagne's (l. 14788–802)—but which in actual fact was to be promulgated in 1244 by the Peace Assembly of the Duchy of Bavaria—whereby peasants had to restrict themselves to humble black, grey, or dark blue clothes and rawhide shoes.⁸⁷

In the late thirteenth century, royal laws were promulgated that set aside a number of materials, colours or accessories, like gilded spurs, for the exclusive use of the nobility. Earlier on, kings had just advocated greater sartorial sobriety, especially on the eve of the Crusades, for purposes of moral reform. At that period, they also attempted to block the importing of expensive cloth that adversely affected their kingdoms' monetary reserves. Such is the intent of the 1258 decision given in Valladolid by King Alfonso X of Castile, who forbade nobles to have more than four outfits a year made for them, or to have them adorned with too much gold, silver, fur, or silk (p. 57). The novel intent of the 1279 and 1294 sumptuary decrees passed by Philip III and Philip IV in France, but also of similar decrees passed elsewhere in the West at that time, was to 'make social hierarchy fit the hierarchy of appearances'.⁸⁸ The quantity and luxury of clothes thus became strictly regulated throughout the noble hierarchy (dukes, earls, barons, castellans, bannerets, knights, etc.) or the hierarchy of wealth. Pursuant to the 1294 *Ordonnance*, only high aristocrats were entitled to four new robes a year; the bourgeoisie, on the other hand, were banned from purchasing minnever, squirrel, or ermine furs, jewels and gold or silver crowns (pp. 541–542). It was during the reign of Philip IV the Fair that the earliest recorded royal letters of ennoblement bear witness to a similar desire to keep the aristocracy under control by steadily divesting it of part of its judicial, military, and fiscal prerogatives in favour of the authority of the king. Thus, the legal definition of people's rank and status came to be embodied in clothing. Royal policies largely coincided with the aristocracy's obstinacy in manifesting their distinction through their attire.

As far as women's clothes were concerned, Garin lo Brun advocates shirts and dresses that 'fit flanks, breast, feet, and arms' (l. 218–20). In particular, shoes should be small and well-adapted to the feet, which should not look big (l. 221–4). In an effort to adjust their mistresses' clothes when helping them dress, ladies-in-waiting had needles and thread

⁸⁷ *Quellen zur Geschichte des deutschen Bauernstandes*, 328.

⁸⁸ Bove, 'L'image de soi dans le jeu des normes sociales', 205.

at hand, according to Amanieu de Sescas (l. 158). In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, poetic descriptions and sculptures confirm the emergence of tailor-made dresses that were tightly adjusted to women's upper bodies, thus enhancing their figure. Sleeves, however, tended to be long and wide, and were detachable, to serve as love tokens for knights, who would tie them to their hauberks. Sometimes skirts would similarly widen out into long trains. Lastly, henins, nets, and other silk or lace headgear superseded thick veils. The new fashion stood in sharp contrast to the sack-like clothing of previous centuries, which was intended to conceal women's bodies. The equivalent on the male side was the emergence of slits in tunics, or the shortening of tunics, thus revealing the calves.⁸⁹ All these developments echoed the more positive view of the human body, and of nature, that began to be conveyed by philosophy at the time, and which may well also be related to the emergence of a more refined expression of love in literature.

Shame and immodesty

In the twelfth century, the immodesty of the new style of clothing was the topic of numerous diatribes by monks. Guibert de Nogent in his *Autobiography* (1114–1117), bewailed the loss of that 'modesty and honesty' of olden times, when young maids used to emulate the irreproachable matrons who supervised them. Today, he complained, their debauchery is revealed not only in their frivolous chatter, dubious jokes, and seductive manners but also in the 'expensiveness of their frocks, so remote from the austerity of yore, the width of their sleeves, the tightness of their tunics, and the upturned point of their Cordoba leather shoes' (I, 12). One generation later, Geoffrey of Vigeois inveighed against extravagant clothes that were twice as costly as those of previous times. They were multi-coloured, adorned with circles or tongue-like patterns, strangely cut and wide-sleeved. Serpent-gaited women no longer bothered to conceal their hair (§73). According to Guillaume de Saint-Thierry, Bernard of Clairvaux had refused to walk out of his monastery to meet his married sister, who had come in full pomp to visit him. Their brother André, another Cistercian, told her she was 'dressed up ordure, because of the luxury of her clothes'. She then burst into tears, repented, and told him she would henceforth follow Bernard's instructions. The latter, when he came to visit her, enjoined her to give up 'worldly glory, the worship of clothes, and the

⁸⁹ Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 138–145.

attractions and vain frivolities of earthly life' (I, VI, 30). The harshness of his words has a lot to do with monachism and its 'contempt of the world (*contemptus mundi*)'. The expensiveness of the new fashion in clothing and the will to be of pleasing appearance stood in opposition to the poverty and humility that were hard and fast demands of the cloister.

In the late twelfth century, preachers continued to oppose the way women squandered their assets on garments. Different to the monks of earlier periods, these preachers were mainly secular: urban priests or mendicant brothers. Maurice de Sully (1160–1196), bishop of Paris, said from the pulpit that he had declined to see his mother on account of her wealthy clothes, which he commanded her to replace with rough sack-cloth. He inveighed against 'those women who expose their necks and hair, anoint their eyebrows, varnish their faces as they would paintings, lace up their arms and flanks, and walk along like cranes. With their faces held up to be seen, they are fiery furnaces of lust. They are wedded to the devil, who brings them hell as a dowry. Their little lascivious game has many a man burning around them.' Modesty, propriety, and simplicity are the ideals at the very heart of the sermon. Female coquettishness arouses male sensuality, and is directly associated with carnal sin. Borrowing ancient recommendations from Tertullian (c. 150–c. 240) and other Church Fathers, the bishop of Paris was not delivering a sermon that was merely abstract and disconnected from social reality: he was specifically targeting the new ways of dressing and of adopting make-up.

In the thirteenth century, Cardinal Jacques de Vitry changed the lyrics of a popular song relating the morning toilet of fair Aelis. His pastiche went: 'When Aelis was up, and got washed, and mass was sung, and the Devil took her!' Moreover, he tells the cautionary tale of Saladin, who, on his deathbed, asked that a small shroud be displayed throughout his estates, and word be given out that he did not take any other cloth with him to the grave. The theme of the vanity of the world, as manifested in the decay of garments, was a recurrent one in sermons. An anonymous commentator on Psalm 38 complained: 'What has become, good people, of your wealthy garments, the silk serge materials, minnever cloaks, and grey squirrel capes which used to be yours?' Lastly, Pierre de Limoges, a Parisian theology master between 1260 and 1290, praised a woman who had had her image engraved on her tombstone, not beautifully clad, but stark naked, because that was the way she had come into this world. A beautiful dress was artificial and misleading, and its cost contradicted the simplicity of Creation. Hence the Dominican Stephen of Bourbon found fault with long trains: 'How can women not blush at wearing an append-

age that Nature has reserved for beasts?' All in all, not only did the new fashions ruin public morality, they also depleted the estates of the nobility and the bourgeoisie. Preachers unceasingly reviled their unreasonable and ruinous luxury.⁹⁰

In the early twelfth century, Anglo-Norman monks castigated men rather than women, and then for being effeminate. Orderic Vitalis rebuked the court of William II Rufus of England, where youths had forsaken their forebears' solid piety and warrior virility in favour of a lascivious female softness or, worse still, of practising sodomy with one another. They wore scorpion-shaped pointed shoes, over-adorned tunics, tight shirts, oversized gloves, capes that swept the dust off floors, and the long, curly hair of prostitutes (VIII, 10). William of Malmesbury likewise criticized the sartorial fashion of youths in King William's entourage, who he claimed wiggled around half-naked as women do and sinned against nature (§314). The personal animosity between the king and the archbishop of Canterbury, Anselm, together with the hostile propaganda spread by Henry I, his brother and successor, who disparaged William in death in order to better set off his own policies by contrast, would certainly go a long way towards explaining his presentation as a homosexual surrounded by minions like himself. The *topos* of the corruption and decadence of the court, which goes back at least to the Stoics, is no doubt another strong factor.

More general criticisms of the magnificence and effeminacy of knights who preferred wealthy outfits to stern warrior costumes were numerous during that period. Bernard of Clairvaux voiced such criticism in his *Praise for the New Knighthood* in order to better emphasize the sobriety of the Templars. He blamed the 'Secular Militia' for covering their horses in silk, for inlaying their saddles and bridles with precious stones, for covering their hauberks in cloth, and for painting their weapons and shields. 'These ornaments are more befitting for women,' as are 'the long mane of hair that offends the eyes or long shirts hanging down to their feet and concealing the hands with their sleeves' (II, 3). Likewise, the stern knight Bertran de Born bemoaned the decadence of chivalry, but also of courtliness. He claimed that the likes of such epic heroes as Ogier the Dane, Bérard de Mondidier or Baldwin, Roland's foster brother, were no longer to be seen in his times. He did, however, see many 'beautiful people, beautiful garments [...], people with well-combed hair, polished teeth, and mustachios over their lips' (XXX, l. 25–30). The convergent beliefs of the rigorist monk and the fierce warrior on the issue of gaudy outfits might

⁹⁰ Burns, *Courtly Love Undressed*, 37–41, 52, 249.

sound paradoxical in view of their opposing lifestyles and aspirations. Both, however, had something in common: their unwavering struggle, whether ascetic or military, and their will to promote a new kind of chivalry, whether it be religious and crusading for the former or lay and worldly for the other. Their common abhorrence of the softening of the knightly ideal, most directly and most spectacularly symbolized in the knights' dress, might well have been one of the reasons for Bertran de Born's later conversion in the Cistercian monastery of Dalon.

Did urban preachers' condemnations of costly and fashionable outfits influence intellectuals? Many a clerk disagreed with them, at least in practice. Herbert of Bosham's green, German-style cut tunic and cloak were unanimously praised by Henry II's courtiers. His master Thomas Becket, before converting, used to wear even more expensive and finer garments. It was in jest that the King once pulled off the chancellor's very fine cloak of scarlet and grey on a winter's day to give it to a poor man who was shivering with cold. William Fitz Stephen relates the anecdote as evidence of the friendship that still existed between Henry II and the clerk who had educated his children in the ways of the world and the Court (§14). Clerical practices were sometimes in contradiction with rigorous preaching.

The clerk Jean de Meun, who was close to the secular masters of the University of Paris and who opposed the Franciscans and Dominicans, provocatively and ironically presents the ridiculous character of the jealous husband complaining about his wife's coquettishness, which he claims is a way of seducing other men but is useless for himself. He also talks about the artificial beauty provided by make-up and fine garments, which will never attain the perfection of lilies or other flowers, as in the Gospel parable (Matth. 6, 28–29), and are only a way of concealing ordure. 'Such women as adorn and decorate themselves are waging war against Chastity,' he inveighs. The displaying of jewels was also abusive to the poor (l. 8847–9086). Jean de Meun borrowed some of these phrases, sometimes verbatim, from the preachers of his time, in the process humorously plagiarizing their sermons. His discourse is wittily ambiguous: his critique, however oblique it may be, of the church authorities' and mendicant brothers' complaints about sartorial refinement is nonetheless evident between the lines of the jealous husband's fictitious diatribe.

Once more, we have to acknowledge the diversity of clerical discourse. Even if monks, mendicants, and a few rigorist bishops were opposed to sartorial wealth and gaudiness, most secular clerks seem to have manifested considerably more indulgence, especially when they belonged to

royal courts or other powerful milieus. They themselves wore fine clothing, being unwilling to cut too peculiar a figure amongst the nobles and bourgeois around them. Theirs was an attitude befitting their positive perception of courtliness—admittedly a worldly virtue, but close in many respects to Christian charity.

Self-control in gestures

Elegance of appearance involved such things as cleanliness, make-up and garments, all external to the body by definition, and insufficient without a more internal form of grace. Ramon Vidal de Besalu thus inveighed against the well-heeled who shone amongst good-for-nothings: ‘They think they are worthy just because they parade in their kirtles or other garments, or else because they enjoy a strong constitution which pleases people’ (l. 1377–80). The troubadour advises his jongleur against socializing with such people, their wealth not being synonymous with either culture or open-mindedness. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century treatises on good manners and romances, sartorial attractiveness is considered worthless unless accompanied by a more personal demeanour such as is expressed through a pleasing figure and harmony of gesture.

Texts also mention pleasant faces: ‘beautiful and welcoming’ (l. 268–9), according to Garin lo Brun, ‘never gloomy’ (l. 1366), according to Ramon Vidal de Besalu. For many mediaevalists, the smile was the epitome of twelfth-century renaissance optimism, which was petrified, as it were, in the eyes of the angels over the door of Reims Cathedral. Some measure of gravity, however, was to be retained, which in the case of women helped to keep importuners at bay: ‘I want accomplished ladies to show some haughtiness, though not too much. This will make her face handsome and also frighten away the wicked. Indeed, if a face is proud, pleasant words or actions can but foster admiration’ (l. 375–7), claims Garin lo Brun. Robert de Blois adopts an even more moralizing tone when he insists on mastery of the eyes, which a woman may not set on a man too often, lest she should make him believe she is in love with him (l. 145–6). He nevertheless urges women to greet in kindly fashion all those whose paths they cross. This advice also extends to their bearing towards the poor, for Christ acknowledges those who treat him with humility (l. 81–96). On the male side, Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan forbids young knights ‘eyes that gape foolishly’ (l. 361–2), that stare at the desired objects, because, along with the hands, these are ‘messengers of the heart’ (l. 359–60).

Moderation was more especially required of a woman's gait. 'Let her stand upright and walk quietly and quite silently. It is not courtly that a woman should strut along the streets, nor that she should dawdle along' (l. 245–52), Garin lo Brun wrote. 'Refrain from trotting or running. Walk upright and proud, without getting too far ahead of those walking along with you' (l. 72–75), Robert de Blois enjoined. Again according to Garin lo Brun, she should also keep her upper body upright when riding a horse (l. 253–6). Keeping oneself straight is a hallmark of aristocratic distinction, achieved in childhood through constant effort and instruction. It is posture that sets nobles apart from villeins. The shepherd's wild monstrous body described in Chrétien de Troyes' *Knight of the Lion* leans inexorably towards the ground: 'His chin merged into his chest and his backbone was long, but twisted and hunched. There he stood, leaning upon his club' (l. 304–6). The land he tills and the cattle he feeds drag the peasant downwards, whereas the knight and his lady look up towards the sky. Combined with a tallness due to their more abundant and varied diet, their upright bodies resulted in their being several inches taller than the common folk. Like clothing, this constituted a material visual display of their social superiority.

A smile meant a hearty welcome, and hospitality was indeed encouraged in the handbooks. Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan urged the young knight he taught to be a boon companion of the guests in his house, to serve them perfectly, to feed them, and to invite them to share his pastimes. He was also to anticipate the demands of such poor folk as might come to his place (l. 385–408). In short, his castle should be open to all and sundry, 'doorless and keyless'; by no means should his doorkeeper use his stick to beat away 'any squire, servant, villein, or jongleur who wished to enter' (l. 442–4). Chrétien de Troyes' romances give lengthy descriptions of how knights errant arriving unannounced at a castle are heartily welcome therein. The poor vavasour, who only has one servant, asks his daughter Enide to walk Erec's horse to the stables, remove the saddle and bridle, feed it with oats and hay, and look after and curry it (l. 451–68). The maid at Pesme Avanture relieves him of his hauberk and his arms, washes his neck and face personally, then draws out from her wardrobe a folded shirt, white drawers, and needle and thread for his sleeves, which she sews on, thus clothing Yvain (l. 5416–25). At the Grail Castle, Perceval is dressed by a squire in a cloak of scarlet, then seated in front of a fireplace, where his host entertains him with conversation before giving him the seat of honour at the high table (l. 3069–98, 3185). At night, in his bedroom, servants take his clothes and shoes

off, lay him down in bed and cover him up with bed sheets (l. 3353–3355).

Long scenes relating how castellans, their womenfolk, and their servants provide a hearty welcome for knights are very common in the romances of the time. These marks of attention are always described in minute detail, suggesting that they must have been frequent in reality. They fostered gratitude in the guest, who would then, in recognition for such welcome, praise his host throughout his subsequent journey, thus spreading his fame everywhere the guest rode. The knight errant was indeed the bearer of tidings, and his coming broke the tedium on estates that were often isolated. He made or unmade reputations, which were crucial in a world where the values of honour and shame reigned supreme. Because of this, his conversation was very much in demand, and partly accounted for the generosity of the welcome he was afforded by people of his own milieu. More importantly, reciprocity was the key to hospitality. Gift and counter-gift, and not of a monetary nature, were customary in the nobility of the times, among whom goods did not circulate according to a strictly quantified framework, but within what ethnologists very aptly name ‘total *prestation*’, i.e. the general obligation of giving, receiving, and mainly reciprocating.

Bounteousness, always praised in the *Ensenhamens* and other didactic treatises, is one of the keystones of courtliness. Gifts fostered social links, and hospitality facilitated social exchange and friendliness, through which the nobles put into practice the refined behavioural rules they considered specific to their world. Indeed, they held their overgenerous attitude to wealth to be an essential trademark of distinction in comparison with merchants and other *nouveaux riches* who would, rather than make a gift of their money, negotiate and hoard it most parsimoniously. Joinville, in his *Life of Saint Louis*, proudly relates how Henry the Liberal (whom he calls by his Old French nickname of ‘Le Large’, the Generous), count of his native Champagne between 1152 and 1181, was once approached by a poor knight who bowed down on his knees before him and asked him for the wherewithal to provide a dowry for his two daughters. Artaud de Nogent, a rich bourgeois from Henry’s circle who had built his own castle with the profits from trade as a merchant, tried to push the knight away; but the count called him a villein, and offered the bourgeois to the knight, as a lord would have offered a serf to another lord. In exchange for recovering his freedom, Artaud was then forced to pay five hundred pounds for the dowries in question (§90–91). The anecdote may be far-fetched, but all the same it is reminiscent of many similar stories recounted throughout

the Western world, and even written down in the Tuscan *Novellino*, on the open-handedness of Henry the Young ‘who used to give away and spend all his assets’ (§20), while surrounded by a cohort of poor knights. His extravagance set in a bad light the meanness of his father, old King Henry II of England.⁹¹ The *juvenis*, a knight errant who would immediately give away his war bounty, thus conflicts with the *senior*, a well-heeled sedentary miser. In the knightly imagination, generosity was incompatible with maturity of age or merchant villeiny, both too careful or thrifty to avoid slipping into avarice.

High minded and generous as the knights’ attitudes towards gifts may have been—even going as far as the custom of potlatch—they were not always indifferent to material realities in their everyday practices. In his *Four Ages of Man*, Philip of Novara, admittedly a rather old man by then, claims that ‘every man should base his generosity on his wealth and condition,’ and that ‘not all acts that fools call generous are indeed so, because extravagance is not generosity’; in short, ‘everyone must thus give in a reasonable fashion’ (§132). Elsewhere in his didactic treatise he further sets aside courtly idealism to favour a cold analysis of the benefits a lord may derive from generosity. If he lacks bravery on the battlefield, yet has a reputation for open-handedness, many a knight will join him, in hope of wages or a share of the bounty (§19).

Guillaume de Lorris was similarly cynical in the *Romance of the Rose*. In his view, and most paradoxically, avarice is harmful to the possessions of the great of this world, ‘who cannot purchase seigniories or estates, for they have few friends they can force their will on’ (l. 1148–51). ‘As the magnet will subtly attract iron,’ he continues, ‘the gold and silver you give away will captivate the hearts of men’ (l. 1156–9). As sociologists before their time, Philip and Guillaume were quick in understanding that any present generates commitments and that clientele networks are fed by gifts. Even though it may be generous and lavish, the giving away of meals, clothes, or monies is not done for nothing. It fosters allegiances that can always be reactivated in favour of the donor.

Even if hospitality and generosity—as manifested in the quest for honour, the building of clientele networks, or the distinction of warrior castes vis-à-vis the merchants—are analysed within a much broader anthropological timeframe, we still have to acknowledge their increased refinement within the narrower timeframe of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The same goes for hunting, which was already considered to be a form of mili-

⁹¹ Puccetti, *Un fantasma letterario*, 13–171.

tary training as well as a means of marking off aristocratic territory to the detriment of the peasants. Its transformations were nevertheless symptoms of a gradual civilizing process. On the one hand, it was no longer the fierce, brutish, dirty wild boar that was bravely hunted on foot with a mere spear, but the great deer, which was hunted on horseback with hounds. Of course, the deer was a timid animal and fled, but it was also considered more elegant and less wild. In literature or iconography, deer hunting may be identified with the quest for the love of a lady, or even for Christ, of whom it is sometimes a symbol.⁹² Meanwhile, the art of falconry spread rapidly within the Western aristocracy, so much so that it soon became one of its most distinctive features. According to Jean de Meun's *Romance of the Rose*, a selfish and slothful nobility claimed their superiority stemmed as much from sport as from their prestigious ancestors: 'They say they have hounds and birds so they appear as noble folk, and that they go hunting through woods, rivers, fields, and heath, indulging in idleness' (l. 18863–7). Indeed, the whole process of catching a bird of prey, whether falcon, hawk, eagle, or kite, domesticating and training it, getting it to fly and hunt aloft and still return to the falconer, overseeing the growth of its adult plumage, and feeding and caring for it properly, required several experienced servants. The spectacle of hawks soaring upwards, flying high in circles, then swooping down like lightning upon their prey, the two falling together to the ground, was a veritable passion with the nobility and became extremely popular with both knights and ladies.⁹³ Even more so than deer hunting, it served to develop courtly sociability.

In the 1210s, Gottfried von Strassburg's *Tristan* repeatedly insisted on the courtliness (*Hövescheit*) of his hero, who, amongst many other qualities, is endowed with good looks, sartorial elegance, conversational skills, fine spirits, and unmatched musical talent. This paragon of manners also enjoys falconry, so much that, at the age of fourteen, he steps on board a ship which has just arrived from Norway to admire the hawks, falcons, and goshawks it was transporting. The merchants then take Tristan himself captive, but thanks to a protracted storm, which they interpret as divine punishment for their crime, they eventually put him ashore in Cornwall (l. 2149–2477). The young boy then meets King Mark's hunters, who have just slain a large stag, which they intended to cut crudely into four pieces. Tristan then asks their permission to skin and cut it up himself, and proceeds in a very methodical way, cutting up every piece with great care

⁹² Pastoureaux, 'La chasse au sanglier'.

⁹³ Van Den Abeele, *La Fauconnerie au Moyen Âge*.

and arranging them all most neatly. Finally, he gives the entrails to the hounds, and gets the procession organized on the way back to the castle, proudly displaying the game he had so skilfully cut up (l. 2874–3064). ‘Bring it over to court in accordance with courtly usage, and your own courtliness will be all the more enhanced,’ he tells them. As a conclusion to the cutting up, which he describes at length, Gottfried praises Tristan’s mastery and skilfulness in the art of cynegetics (l. 3053–3064). Yet this is but one of the young man’s qualities, for Tristan is also a fierce and devoted chess player. That indeed was how the merchants succeeded in taking him captive in the first place: they invited him on board to play a game, in which he became so deeply engrossed that he failed to notice the ship had cast off (l. 2220–2317).

Did board games, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, undergo a similar process of refinement to that of hunting? Such was most likely the case for chess, courtly Tristan’s favourite game. Interestingly, troubadours like William IX of Aquitaine (1071–1127), the first of them, make it the image of the lovers’ encounter. *Langue d’oïl* literature also teems with examples. In *Raoul de Cambrai*, at the end of the twelfth century, Beatrice tries to win the heart of Bernier, the hero of the *chanson de geste*, during a game that has them alone in her chambers (l. 5440–5444). Half a century on, *Huon de Bordeaux* (1260–1268) has the daughter of Babylon’s emir losing a game on purpose out of love for her opponent. Indeed, her father had ruled that the prize for the game was to be Huon’s life should his daughter win, or her hand in marriage should he win (l. 7523–7571). Galantry is also of the essence in *Clef d’amour*, a French adaptation of Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* (‘The Art of Love’), in which knights are advised to allow themselves to be defeated at chess, but also at dice and other board games, by the ladies they intend to conquer (l. 1409–1416). It was thus that, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the amorous game of seduction played on boards would seem to supersede the strategic battles fought by warriors in earlier periods. The replacement at this period of the original Persian chess pieces—the vizier by the queen, and the elephant by the fool or bishop—coincides with the same courtly evolution, with the two military pieces making room for two courtiers.⁹⁴ Lastly, when there was a bet involved, winning the stakes became an opportunity to show generosity. Joinville, in his *Life of Saint Louis*, tells the story of Alfonso of Poitiers (1241–1271), the king’s brother, who used to ‘play in such a courtly way that, whenever he won, he had the room opened up and any gentle-

⁹⁴ Makariou, ‘Le jeu d’échecs, une pratique aristocratique’, 128–131.

men or ladies called, to give away his own money as well as that which he had won' (§418). His liberality was such, the chronicler adds, that even when he lost, he would still hand out his silver coins.

Table manners

Etiquette manuals are full of guidelines on proper behaviour in regard to eating and drinking. Their foremost recommendation is cleanliness. John of Garland urges hosts to see that their tableware is impeccable (l. 167). According to Petrus Alphonsi, washing one's hands before and after a meal is both 'hygienic and courtly' (*physicum et curiale*), for rubbing one's eyes with dirty hands may cause ophtalmia (XXVI, 9). Another gesture that should be made before and after banqueting is saying Benedicite and grace. The first lines of *Quisquis es in mensa* read as follows: 'Whoever you may be, when at table, think first about the poor man; if you feed him, my friend, you are feeding God.' Prayers for the departed were then expected. The poem, and its subsequent adaptations in the vernacular, entitled *Countenance at table*, in the manuscripts, contain a large number of recommendations regarding temperance: never rush, never ask for more when the dish has been carried off, never drink with a full mouth, never help yourself too much from the first dish, never indulge overly in cheese or walnuts, etc. To which the *Facetus* adds that guests should not bite into the slice of bread which, in those days, was set in front of them and used as a plate (l. 109). Likewise, it condemns blowing on hot dishes to enable them to be eaten faster, which risks spitting on one's neighbour (l. 223–4). Robert de Blois claims that 'it is not courtliness, but sheer gluttony' to pick the best morsels or to put them in one's mouth when they are too big or hot. It is not merely one's honour, but also one's health that is in jeopardy, as one may choke or one's mouth may be burnt (l. 508–20). Like Petrus Alphonsi, Robert de Blois justifies this behaviour on medical grounds. However, on the subject of honour, meaning the image one presents of oneself, he is concerned rather with the revulsion that gluttony may excite in other guests.

Unsurprisingly, temperance in drinking is highly recommended. 'Avoid drinking out of the cup as avidly as Bacchus!' (l. 948), says Daniel of Beccles. Amanieu de Sescas urges women always to dilute their wine with water. If they fail to, they could become overstimulated and give way to lust (l. 234–47). In the *Romance of the Rose*, Jean de Meun advises ladies to sip their drinks, lest they be taken for quaffers. They should

never get tipsy or drunk; but in this respect Jean has nothing to say about the carnal temptations Amanieu alludes to, and focuses rather on discretion: 'In a drunken man or woman, secrets cannot be kept. A woman who has had too much to drink is defenceless and will start saying everything she thinks, and in that sorry state she opens herself up to one and all' (l. 13454–60). Drinking is certainly permitted, but with 'moderation,' the key word in table manners. This restraint is expressed in the words exchanged with one's neighbours, as in a toast, before touching one's lips to the raised cup. Geoffrey of Monmouth, in his *History of the Kings of Britain* (1136–1138), traces the origins of the expression *Wasseil!* and its response *Drincheil!* back to the Saxon invaders who arrived on the island with their chief Hengist. It was his daughter Rowena who allegedly taught these words to the Celtic King Vortigern, while handing him a cup of wine in order to seduce him—unfortunately for Britain (§100). Around 1180, these two Anglo-Saxon words were pronounced by drinkers at the banquet described by Daniel of Beccles (l. 1071–5).

Hugh of Saint Victor notes, somewhat ironically, that one should not launch oneself upon one's food the way a king launches himself on the city he is besieging, breaking down walls left, right, and centre. One should not pick and choose the finest morsels either, thus 'indulging in the whims of pregnant women'. The author's key words are 'measure', 'temperance' and 'discipline', qualities which he comments on at great length (XVIII–XXI). The monastic and Neoplatonic subtext in his works may explain his tendency to find moral justification for gestures that most manuals merely expound upon. In a similar context, Peter Abelard's *Carmen ad Astrolabum* ('Advice to Astrolabe') highlights the positive effects of 'great sobriety, both a virtue and medicine, on both body and heart.' According to them, health and longevity are a result of the frugality of the regimens which good men practise (l. 341–344). At the end of the thirteenth century, the idea is very briefly touched on in a long didactic poem in German by Hugo von Trimberg: 'Excessive drinking and eating are often harmful to body, soul, honour, and estate' (l. 9569–9571).

Another chapter on table manners concerns whatever indisposes one's neighbours. Indeed, in those days commensals would drink or eat from a glass or dish for two, and there would be only a few knives on the table to serve the needs of all. As dishes were not served individually, this sharing necessitated clear-cut rules, delimiting each guest's personal space as far as possible. Manuals listed these rules in the negative form: do not put back upon the plate a piece of food you have already bitten into, or your own spoon; do not put your fingers in the plate while your partner's are in

it; do not dip your food into the common salt vessel, nor your fingers in the sauce; clean your lips often with a napkin, especially before using the glass; do not put your fingers in said glass; drink or cast away the wine in which you have dipped your bread; do not use your knife to bring the food to your mouth; do not play with the napkin; and so on. Moreover, all etiquette manuals forbid those gestures which, because they pertain to poor hygiene, exhalation, or even ejection, might sicken other guests. They also forbid nose- or ear-picking, noisy nose-blowing, picking one's teeth with a knife, spitting back a chewed morsel, especially over the table, belching, scratching oneself, or cleaning teeth, nose, or eyes with the tablecloth or one's sleeve. Leaning on one's elbows is forbidden, possibly because your neighbour's space is thereby invaded, or because you might upset the board that rested unstably on its trestles, or because it would amount to sprawling; while the prohibition against falling asleep at table is repeated in all didactic treatises. Such self-control and focusing on one's personal sphere, which implies respect and self-restraint towards one's table companions, echoes the 'privatisation of bodily functions' or 'inner colonizing, fostered by the internalization and repression of one's impulses' that Norbert Elias has wrongly identified as going back only to the late Middle Ages or even to the modern period.⁹⁵

Our sources often mention the hierarchy inherent in the seating plan of the guests at table. Their pernicky sense of honour drives noblemen to pay particular attention to precedence. *A contrario* evidence of this is to be found in the invention of the Round Table by King Arthur. The earliest literary mention of it, in Wace's *Brut* (1155), emphasizes the equality fostered by its round form: 'When his fair fellowship sat to meet, their chairs should be of equal height, their service equal, and none before or after his comrade. Thus no man could boast that he was exalted above his fellows, for all alike were gathered round the board, and none was alien at the breaking of Arthur's bread' (l. 9753–8). The priest Layamon, who adapted and augmented the romance in Anglo-Saxon verse around 1200, imagined the rationale for the Round Table (l. 22737). One Christmas day, supposedly the most peaceful day of the year, a terrible fight broke out between seven kings' sons and their seven hundred knights for the best places and morsels. In reprisal thereof, the king has the troublemaker beheaded, together with his dearest kin, and their women's noses carved off. In order to forestall any further conflict, the king bids a Cornish master carpenter build him a round table to sit sixteen hundred, which, because it

⁹⁵ *La Civilisation des mœurs*. Cf. Roussel, 'Le legs de la rose', 46–48.

had no angles at all, abolished precedence. Without outstripping fiction, reality is nevertheless spectacular at times: the Austrian chronicler Ottokar of Styria relates how, during a banquet given in 1298 in Nuremberg by Albert I of Habsburg (1283–1308) to celebrate his accession to the Roman throne, the archbishop of Mainz seated himself to the right of the King, in violation of the rights of the archbishop of Cologne. The latter left the room in rage and protest, demanding a duel (l. 73401–73408). Once more, the quest for honour, or in this case for precedence, fostered rivalry and its violent consequences.

During a meal, women were typically served before men, who thereby expressed their respect for the fairer sex. On this point, Amanieu de Sescas pointedly warns young maidens: ‘Your tablemate would be a boor if he did not serve you before himself. By no means would his preceptor have educated him properly. He would be a crude oaf whose education would amount to very little!’ (l. 263–269). However, at the same period, in the *Romance of the Rose*, Jean de Meun describes in great detail how the woman, in rich garments and conspicuous make-up, should take great care of male guests. She was supposed to sit last and to stand up often to serve. Having seated herself, she was to serve first the partner who would eat from the same plate as herself, provide him with the breast or leg, or carve up the beef or pork for him. She was expected to slice the bread for her commensals and give them generous second helpings (l. 13394–13411). She should then make sure she herself ate precious little, and with exquisite politeness (l. 13412–13449). In point of fact, Jean de Meun’s recommendations are largely parody. What he shows is a woman going out of her way to please men, before her youth vanishes and her beauty withers away. The scene ends ridiculously with the women falling asleep at the table, which may symbolize those who take too long to find a husband. He goes on to add a further piece of advice: ‘The lady should not lag behind in playing the game of love, lest she should wait so long that none would be willing to ask for her hand (l. 13479–13482). Lastly, the maiden Jean’s text portrays is the daughter of the house, understandably eager to serve her guests properly. Otherwise, courtliness makes it the duty of male guests to show attention to women.

During meals, hierarchy is mostly manifested through the respect shown for one’s host, who starts by saying *Benedicite* or signals for the guests to be seated: ‘Let no one eat any food before it is blessed, and no one take a seat before the person chairing the meal says to do so,’ declares the *Quisquis es in mensa* (l. 4–5). Incidentally, this short pause before meals are served is also a manifestation of the restraint advocated by mor-

alists. According to Daniel of Beccles's *Urbanus Magnus*, as soon as the master touches his lips to the cup, all the guests should stop eating and drinking, and lay their hands on the table, while servants put a knee on the ground and spread their hands (l. 1076–1079). Less dramatically, a *Conenance de table* in French recommends that one should always let the master drink first; but on the other hand, it is forbidden to bid him do so; likewise, he should be properly thanked (II, l.39–40, 83–88). Also, according to *Urbanus Magnus*, the guest sitting next to the host should eat in silence, unless asked to speak (l. 1064–1065). The book, which seems to be aimed at young squires and servants of the nobility trained in a great lord's house, certainly attaches much importance to the respect and fear that the master of the house should inspire.⁹⁶ A like tone is to be found in the advice given by Amanieu de Sescas to maids of honour, who will for instance see that they are always seated below their ladies, unless otherwise instructed (l. 283–292).

When service at table is entrusted to noble daughters and sons, it is for the pedagogical purposes of learning good manners. Herbert of Bosham relates how Henry the Young, the king's son, and other young aristocrats, all dressed in purple livery, served the table of their preceptor, Archbishop Thomas Becket, and imitated his 'magnificence, which he transmits to them with much civility, and teaches them with urbanity' (III, 15). Ancillary tasks not only show to advantage the lord who is served but may also honour those who perform them. This is particularly true in the circle of the king, whose closeness grants power. Prestigious as it may be, the word 'ministry' (*ministerium*) is to be translated as 'service'. In the twelfth century, the names of the most prominent offices in the French court all refer to their ancillary origins: seneschal ('the senior servant'), constable ('in charge of the stables'), *bouteiller* (butler, 'in charge of wine cellars'), *chambrier* (chamberlain, 'in charge of the king's chambers and the treasury therein').

Sometimes fights would break out over the service of the King. Walter Map relates how, at the beginning of a Christmas banquet given in Caen by Henry II of England, William of Tancarville, his grand chamberlain, walked out from the crowd, tore his cloak off, snatched the silver basins, and began washing the hands of the king and his kindred. The seneschal of Normandy, most critical of his action, called a meeting of the Council in order to judge him. In his defence, William argued that his father had been presented the basins by Henry I and had kept them in the monastery

⁹⁶ Lachaud, 'L'enseignement des bonnes manières', 47, 51–52.

he founded on his estate. He was prepared to fight a duel, he said, in person and without a champion, against anyone who would dispute that right. The king then vindicated him, recalling how William, earl of Arundel, turned up unannounced in the middle of a banquet he was giving in honour of Louis VII of France. The earl, just back from a three-year pilgrimage in Jerusalem, was poorly clad. He ran at the butler, tore the carafe away from him, and poured the wine for the king, thus exercising his ancestral right. Henry II further explained that William of Arundel, when challenging the butler for his task, was only acting 'out of courtliness, not out of arrogance'. He asked the Norman barons to judge William of Tan-carville by the same standards (V, 6). Violent as it may be, the precedence dispute does not, in this case, concern a prestigious position of seating next to the king, but the hereditary privilege of serving the king.

Since he is at the top of the power hierarchy, the king, unlike his subjects, cannot possibly perform any servile acts. The same goes for the lord in his castle. For such a rule to be broken required exceptional circumstances. In the spring of 1170, Henry II, after attending the crowning of his son and namesake, apparently himself brought cups and dishes to him during the meal. Ten years or so later, William, a monk of Canterbury, was angry against Henry II for having denied to Thomas Becket the right of performing this coronation. In his *Life* of the saint archbishop he wrote: 'The father-King vouchsafed to serve the son-King, thereby proclaiming that he was no longer King!' (§78). At the beginning of the thirteenth century, an Anglo-Norman poem about Becket, of which all that remains is a set of splendidly illuminated folios, perhaps written and painted by Matthew Paris, noted that never was a king better served than the young Henry by his father, who was thereby demoted to the rank of 'sergeant'. The poem adds, however, that the old king was soon to rue the day when he indulged his son, who took up arms against him three years later (III, l.33–48). The miniature illustrating these verses shows Henry II, standing, presenting his seated son with a lidded hanap: both are crowned, and at their feet sits a harpist. The inversion of the strict hierarchy that should regulate behaviour at table is all the more negative according to Becket hagiographers because it follows—by a few hours—an unwarranted coronation and precedes—by a few months—the murder in the cathedral.

The Franciscan Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, Saint Louis's confessor, who was commissioned by the royal family to write the king's biography shortly after Louis's canonisation in 1297, presents us with quite a different picture. He shows the king of France feeding thirteen beggars in his chambers and washing their feet. Sometimes he eats from their leftovers,

all the more so when they were lepers, unhesitatingly feeding them with his own hands. At Royaumont monastery, he stands up and fetches dishes from the kitchen for the monks, staining his precious clothes with food in the process (pp. 79–86, 107). Humility and asceticism thus take precedence over royal dignity and disgust for lepers, resulting in compassionate deeds that are performed in the name of charity. For the king's part, they are constantly supplemented by deprivation of food, the flesh being mortified by fasting.⁹⁷ Honour and shame, which are worldly qualities, come to be abolished through the example of Christ, whom Louis IX means to imitate: 'I have not come to be served, but to serve' (Matth. 20, 28). The inversion of the hierarchy of commensality thus serves a Christian ideal.

The art of pleasant conversation

Conversation is essential during meals. According to John of Salisbury's *Policraticus*, it may even become salutary for the soul, in accordance with the example of Christ who would multiply loaves of bread and feed the crowds while preaching to them. That is why each and everyone may enrich himself with numerous teachings during banquets. He goes on to conclude: 'Very gloomy and almost foreign to civility are meals where only the belly is filled, unaccompanied by the pleasure of conversation, and where there is the loud noise as of hissing geese and silly gossip' (VIII, 9). Like John of Salisbury, Herbert of Bosham was a companion of Thomas Becket, whom he followed into exile. In his biography, he describes the conversation at the archbishop's banquets, but also the seating arrangements and the martyr's temperance. Scholars and clerks in his entourage would sit on his right, monks and other clerics on his left. Knights, however, would eat at another table, lest they become bored listening to Becket and his commensals reading from, or commenting on the Scriptures, or engaging in philosophical debate, all in Latin. In any case, they are better served at their own table (III, 15). It is thus natural that the *Policraticus* should remind us of the Athenian philosophical symposia, where Socrates developed his theories of justice and Timaeus of Locri his theories on causality (VIII, 6). As an accomplished Neoplatonic philosopher (and Thomas Becket's mentor), John of Salisbury holds meals to be a privileged time for the exchange of ideas. The diffusive warmth of the symposium brings scholars together, causing them to formulate lofty thoughts.

⁹⁷ Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, 628–634.

Even in less prestigious surroundings than Becket's learned circle, manuals on good manners often focus on table talk. *Quisquis es in mensa* offers an accurate summary of their main recommendations, all aimed at good understanding, as always: 'Never utter such words as may sound bitter to someone, as he may take offence; discord would result thereof. Let your face be smiling, but never mock anyone. The less you speak, the more pleasant you will be for your companions' (l. 18–21). The last sentence is probably inspired by one of the *Moral Distichs* of Dionysius Cato: 'Be reserved during meals, as you may sound over-talkative should you be too eager to please' (Book 3, XIX). The *Siete partidas* of Alfonso X of Castile advises rather a measured tone of voice, which should be pitched between whispering and shouting: 'One should not remain too silent, nor murmur into someone's ears, nor communicate through signs as monks do, nor, on the contrary, speak too loud' (II, IX, 29). The signs are condemned because they appear too directive or authoritarian for the table companion for whom they are meant. They might thus be felt to be offensive. Alfonso compares them to the rich sign language in monastic refectories, where reading aloud imposes silence on table companions. This is yet another point on which monachism and courtliness are at odds. Moderation and agreeableness are the two pillars of the man of the world, who should make a point of being sociable, whereas monks isolate themselves in the desert to seek a direct relationship with God, regardless of what others may think of them.

Also forbidden is to speak with one's mouth full. Petrus Alphonsi justifies the ban on medical grounds: the risk of choking to death when food gets into the respiratory tract (XXVI, 9). A functional reason for the prohibition, if any, is rather to be found in the disgust for the food that was perforce spat out on account of the need to fill up the space with sound. Thirteenth-century moral theology might perhaps provide alternative arguments as well. Indeed, it holds that the tongue may sin through two different channels: taste and talk, thus associating gluttony with small talk and bad talk with drunkenness. In a manual providing guidelines on penitents' soul-searching, Robert de Sorbon gradually shifts from gluttony to flattery, calumny, idle talk, cursing, perjury, lies, and blasphemy.⁹⁸ Both gluttony in eating and pride in conversation cause men to swallow and speak at one and the same time. Such precipitation is thus harmful to the self-control and moderation advocated by the moralists, causing the tongue to sin twice over.

⁹⁸ Casagrande and Vecchio, *Les Péchés de la langue*, 114.

In the same vein as prescriptions concerning table manners, Garin lo Brun claims that one of the defining features of courtliness is to 'speak pleasingly to others' (l. 460). Recall that he associated lively conversation with a hearty welcome and with kindness. In an allegory, Guillaume de Lorris makes Courtliness a woman, 'wise and sensible, giving beautiful, temperate answers, and speaking beautiful words' (l. 1233–1234). The recommendation that words should be amiable, which means, etymologically, 'that which wins love,' is an ever-recurring one in treatises on morality or good manners as well as in romances. It goes far beyond commensality, and affects all situations of sociability. Conversely, words born of anger must be avoided: Robert de Blois begins by writing 'Ladies, I would like to advise you, over and above anything else, against scolding others,' before going on to describe in great detail the ill effects of acrimonious talk and intemperate language, which debase women to the status of harlots. It is not worth talking back when insulted, he adds. On the one hand, a man who offends a woman by his words, thereby invites opprobrium and shame upon himself. On the other hand, a woman who insults one of her gender, only to be met with the indifference of her victim, will feel as if 'her heart and belly were being torn apart' (l. 293). All in all, when faced with undeserved treatment, silence seems to be the most appropriate response, a way of behaving that requires self-mastery.

Negative value judgments, especially concerning those who are absent, should be banned from social life. As Dionysius Cato asserted, they can backfire against those who make them: 'One should never criticize the words or deeds of others, lest one be mocked in turn' (Book 3, VII). Slander is more particularly condemned, especially when women's reputations are at stake. The *Roman des Ailes* ('Romance of Wings') encouraged the courtly knight to have a song composed in favour of the woman he had heard vilified (l. 327–336). Daniel of Beccles inveighed against the universal spread of slander and unfair accusations, which should be left unanswered, for truth and virtue always win out in the end (l. 386–393). Conversely, constant praise is not becoming either (l. 89–93). Sycophancy is condemned on account of its hypocrisy or the vanity it fosters at the receiving end, and Daniel's remarks on criticism aim once again at avoiding dissension.

His *Urbanus Magnus* expatiates on affability of speech, which facilitates social relations; it should always take circumstances into account: 'Take great care, my dear, to whom you are speaking, what you are speaking about, why and when' (l. 640). In the *Instruction of Novices* (XIII) by Hugh of Saint Victor, and also in other monastic rules, these

four criteria are supplemented by a fifth, patterned on classical rhetoric: 'the way of saying it'. The tongue should therefore never utter any offending, ironic, or bitter words, which might foster tension. 'Never become loud in words nor violent in deeds, never hated for your outrageous words nor furious for petty offences' (l. 615–616), says John of Garland. The basic and recurrent commandment of courtliness might be summarized as 'Thou shalt not offend,' a precept that enjoyed such respect that Peter Abelard himself felt obliged to write to educate his son Astrolabe that even a prostitute is preferable to a wife, however chaste, whose tongue fomented household strife to the point of devastating it (l. 223–242). In short, gentleness and affability, or, to use the mediaeval equivalent, 'mildness' (*mansuetudo*), are essential to life in society.⁹⁹ They preclude conflict in everyday matters.

Should sincerity then be discarded in order to avoid offending others? In this respect, a vision of manners, which might be called monastic, advocates harmony between inner and outer man, thought and reality, being and appearing. Jean de Limoges, the abbot of the Cistercian monastery of Zirc (Hungary) in the years 1208–1218, imagines the correspondence between Pharaoh and Joseph, his Jewish councillor, praised in the Old Testament for his justice and considered by Christians—at least since the adaptation of Cicero's *De Officiis* by Ambrosius of Milan—as the paragon of ministers. In one of these letters, Joseph expresses great reluctance about going to the court, to where Pharaoh urges him to come and interpret his dreams. What he fears most is that he might betray his conscience, which urges him to tell the truth, always and everywhere. Should he be truthful, he will incur the resentment of the courtiers; should he lie, the punishment of God. So he asks Pharaoh to find another councillor (*ep.* 7). The Stoics' pet theme of *Exeat aula* ('Let he [who would be fair] leave the Court!') is in this instance part of a meditation on truth and lies. The Cistercian abbot sets frankness above courtliness (which advocates pleasing others at any cost) and the dissimulation practised by laymen.

We should not overstate the hypocrisy of courtiers, or even courtly knights. Dionysius Cato's *Moral Distichs* offer the general recommendation: 'Do not leave faults unspoken when they are known to you, for your silence would seem to encourage the wicked' (Book 3, XV). And, further on: 'Instruct the ignorant so that they may help spread the science of useful things' (Book 3, XXIII). Twelfth- and thirteenth-century manuals are

⁹⁹ Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*, 36–37. Cf. Gillingham, 'From *Civilitas* to *Civility*', 277–279.

even more precise when they advise fraternal rebuking of the naive, incompetent, or deviant, an act of pity encouraged by Christ (Matth.: 18, 15–20). Even if Daniel of Beccles recommends remaining patiently silent when a friend utters irritating words (l. 669–77), he does not forbid his readers outright from telling the friend that he or she is being irritating. What is needed is gentleness: ‘He who errs should not be ridiculed; if you know the right path, correct him politely’, he writes elsewhere (l. 159–60). The *Apprise de nurture* (‘Apprenticeship of Education’), an Anglo-Norman poem of which only one copy—dated 1430—is extant, is even more specific: ‘You should never point out anyone’s mistakes in public, but wait till you can tell them gently in private’ (l. 224–8). The phrasing shows, on the one hand, that one should respect the honour of others, who must not be publicly ridiculed lest harmony and friendliness be destroyed; on the other hand, it is predicated on some form of privatization of social relations, through which one-to-one conversation may help the personal progress of the one who is corrected.

In the minds of the clerks, but also of the monks of that period, discretion does not necessarily imply dissimulation or lies. It often appears as a token of respect pertaining to temperance. Daniel of Beccles, following up on a recommendation by ancient philosophers and Christian moralists, bans, along with many other things, the bringing up of shameful, frivolous, or inappropriate topics (l. 97, 664–668). According to him, indiscretion always stems from negligence due to drunkenness, envy, hatred, lust, or frivolity (l. 661–662). These sins are diametrically opposed to such qualities as openness and availability to others, which are essential for dialogue. Daniel further adds that one should be attentive to one’s interlocutor, look him in the eye, remain quiet, and reply appropriately (l. 98–103). It is exactly what *Facetus* too recommends: ‘When spoken to, look your interlocutor in the face, and let his words sink into the secret of your mind’ (l. 187–188). Far from being superficial, oral communication involves empathy and thoughtfulness. If it is to become a source of personal development, dialogue demands attention, which in turn demands some self-control.

Discretion is especially recommended in relations between men and women. In this domain, it is seldom the men to whom such advice is offered. The exception seems to be the sentence in *Apprise de nurture*: ‘If a woman addresses you in jest, be sure to control your words or gestures: if you do something inappropriate, you might be blamed for being ill-educated, which might result in shame’ (l. 175–180). Discretion, on the other hand, is repeatedly recommended for females. Robert de Blois ac-

knowledges that the happy medium is not easily found in such matters: 'They must contain themselves and show great measure in their silence as well as in their words. She would be poorly educated who might be said to talk too much [...]. Should she remain overly silent, however, she would make herself neither amiable nor popular, for she does not know how to address people' (l. 11–26). Garin lo Brun has less time for subtleties: 'Silence is worth more than foolish talk' (l. 341–342). And again: 'Always speak little, for well considered words are more pleasant; one is more inclined to listen to a woman who thinks before she speaks' (l. 351–356). Experience shows that one never regrets eschewing a topic which one would very much have liked to bring up (l. 347–350). Even if Garin advises ladies to receive men politely, they 'should not show such poor judgement as to talk over-indulgently from the very first meeting' (l. 309–311). The issue of suitors is also mentioned by Amanieu de Sescas, who advocates, amongst other things, a stratagem to thwart the advances of overeager men. All women need to do is to engage them in a debate on the superiority of the beauty and courtliness of females from Gascony or England, and systematically support the opposite side. The maiden will then call on other people to take part in the argument, thus avoiding a face-to-face debate with the unwelcome party (l. 293–322).

Behind their essentially ethical tone, the prescriptions of twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts on conversation conceal a measure of elitism. When, in one of his songs, William IX of Aquitaine asks lovers to 'refrain from bad language at the Court,' he seems to be rejecting the crudeness of boors rather than malice (VII, l. 35–36). Discussion is one of the key elements, possibly the chief element, of aristocratic sociability. Amanieu de Sescas's *Teaching of the Squire* opens with the inversion of the *topos* of the beginning of springtime—a favourite among other troubadours, who always declare themselves elated at the start of the warm season, which brings with it the desire to love. On the contrary, Amanieu rejoices over the Christmas cold, when he can lock himself up in his fortified manor house and converse with his kindred and squires on 'topics of joy, arms, and love' (l. 9–10). In many respects, the nobility considers the military and amorous themes of conversation, approached by them from a worldly and joyful angle, as its exclusive monopoly.

In order to determine the appropriate register, the way one expresses oneself is as important, or perhaps even more so, than the topics under discussion. Such is the case for the forms of address to be used in varied circumstances. From the thirteenth century onwards, conversation manuals and lexicons provide short lists of what to call someone according to

rank, or in everyday situations.¹⁰⁰ However, linguistic codes cannot possibly be reduced to these fixed expressions. They also concern range of vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, clarity of speech, and prestigious pronunciation. A paragon of courtliness, Gottfried von Strassburg's Tristan pleasantly surprises King Mark's courtiers with the wisdom and measure of his words (l. 2731–2743). But his good form is also impressive as he 'slips into his conversation elegant idioms, or many a well-pronounced foreign word' during a game of chess (l. 2888–2891). His mastery of languages is indeed outstanding. Not only does he speak the Breton of his native Armorica but also Norwegian, which he learned from the merchants who took him captive, Welsh, French, and the Latin of the lays he sings with his harp (l. 3626–3628). The lettered knight should thus have several languages, at least literary ones, at his command. For him, singing in a foreign language is a token of distinction.

Some courts make bilingualism, even trilingualism, a requirement. In the entourage of Henry II of England, who Walter Map claims knew all the languages spoken between the Atlantic and the river Jordan (V, 6), one could hear the Latin of the clerics, but also Anglo-Norman French, Anglo-Saxon, and Welsh. A mastery of French, the prestigious language of the island's conquerors and colonizers, was a status symbol. To put down a political enemy, the easy way is to scoff at his accent. The same Walter Map complains about the bad Anglo-Norman spoken by Geoffrey of York, the king's bastard son, who he says speaks the dialect of Marlborough, a barbaric mumbo-jumbo of which those who have drunk from the city's fountain cannot possibly rid themselves. Other language fashions, however, are more difficult to interpret. 'Thy stride and clothes and mien should have a foreign air. Thy alien tongue should utter naught but alien sounds. Tell all, thou art a native of Poitou, for there one speaks with a freer tongue,' suggests the prologue of *Policraticus* (l. 13–16). Could it be that English noblemen harboured an inferiority complex on account of their Anglo-Norman dialect, which they held to be less pure than the continental varieties of the *langue d'oïl*? If so, it would counterbalance the superiority they held that same dialect to enjoy over the Anglo-Saxon or Celtic languages, those spoken by the vanquished, the peasants of the island.

All in all, the use of language is a precondition of courtliness, and most likely its key ingredient. It pertains to elegance, and thus to manners, in accordance with the principle of the aesthetic manifestation of ethics, a

¹⁰⁰ Roussel, 'Le legs de la rose', 15.

seminal one for twelfth- and thirteenth-century neo-Stoics and clerks. In Latin, the meaning of *conversatio* is not only 'dialogue' or 'discussion' but more generally mores and lifestyle. Within chivalry, education is more often transmitted orally than in written form. Even as he initiates him in grammar or rhetoric, the ideal preceptor also regulates his pupil's conduct. Not only does he teach him how to speak elegantly to his entourage but also pleasantly. His words are never directed at sowing discord, but to achieving concord. The same goes for his gestures, which should eschew any offence or disgust. The perfect knight is reasonable and composed, not impassioned, for as the troubadour Folquet de Marseille (c. 1150–1231) sang: 'Courtliness is nothing but measured behaviour' (IV, l. 41). Even though this may appear to be a contradiction in terms, a good warrior should be gentle and peace-loving, at least in society.

Perceforest, a romance whose original version was composed in Hainaut in 1337–1344, represents an important landmark in the history of courtliness. Its eponymous hero, a king, voices this precept for the knights in his entourage: 'I remember that a saintly man once taught me that knights and clerks should be like young maidens, for a young maiden should be simple and speak little. She should be courtly, chaste, and honest in speech, and gentle in deed, kind, and full of pity to the good, but proud, haughty, and hard towards all those with evil designs on her [...]. My lords, so should it be with you, for no gentleman should be awarded a knighthood, however gallant he may be, if he doesn't match the maiden in grace and virtue [...]. If you wish to receive honour, you ought to strive hard to resemble the maiden, as befits a knight' (II, §486–489). The thematic inversion, which amounts to advocating the feminization of warriors, might come as a surprise. Yet it was merely the outcome of a long civilizing process which gained considerable momentum in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Moreover, this highlights the central role of ladies and maidens in matters of good manners, of which they appear both as tone-setters and arbitrators.

The reason why the intellectuals of the time constantly emphasized deportment, moderation in gestures, and pleasantness in conversation is that, in their view, good manners foster empathy, and thus promote conviviality. They held good manners to be weavers of the social fabric and harmonizers of relations between people. They conferred all the more renown the more soft they were. Such a conception of aristocratic honour, based as it is on the esteem won by pleasant behaviour, stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing view of reputation, which men of those times were supposed to defend through violent, bellicose response to any word or deed

that might be deemed offensive to the ladies of their lineage. Conversely, Daniel of Beccles advises the over-jealous husband ‘to learn how to stare at the ceiling’ (l. 2005), by which he means to pay no heed to such flirtatious conversations—or even worse—which his wife might indulge in. What is sought above all is, indeed, concord.

Elegance and distinction now endowed their holders with an indefinable good-humoured ease, far removed from violence, quarrelsomeness, or vengeance. This urbanity was to be found more at court than at war. And indeed, from the twelfth century on, ‘symbolic capital’, the capacity to impose oneself in the ‘social field’, began to be measured more by courtliness than by chivalry. Manners became inextricably entwined with book learning. Both regulated the behaviour and conversation of noblemen keen to win the esteem of the ruling class. Those endowed with composure and knowledge were thus equipped with the resources to operate with ease in the curial milieu, to master bureaucratic tools, and to counsel the prince. They were thus given easy access to the centres of government.

This new sensitivity, according to which no one should offend others, especially the powerful, coincided with the more general pacification of the aristocracy. Seigneurial wars were on the decline, royalty was returning to the forefront, and the development of royal administrations through the multiplication of written orders were instrumental to this trend. The greatest power began to concentrate in the royal or princely courts, to the detriment of the castellanies, which were slowly losing their independence. If they were to advance, aristocrats had to repair to the royal palaces. There they adopted that regulated behaviour the rudiments of which they had learned from their clerical preceptors. While arriving at court, they recalled perhaps the education they had received before in ladies’ chambers from their mothers and other women living in the castles. Courtly love had indeed prepared them to courtly life in the kings’, and princes’ palaces.

LOVE: REFINEMENT AND SELF-CONTROL

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the phrase *fin'amor* is ever-recurring in Occitan troubadour songs. It may be translated as 'pure love,' with overtones of authenticity, sincerity, and perfection. The phrase was also used in other languages, especially in northern trouvère poems or Germanic *Minnesänger*, but also in chivalric romances. Other collocations, albeit less frequent, cover the same idea, for example 'loyal love' (in *langue d'oc*, *leiala*), 'true love' (*veraia*), 'good love' (*bona*), 'love from the heart' (*corala*), or 'courtly love' (*cortez'amor*). The latter expression appears only once in all troubadours' poems. It has nonetheless become hackneyed by the Romantic nineteenth century. It is not, however, anachronistic.

The highly valorising link between love and courtliness was established by many a mediaeval writer. In the 1150s, the troubadour Cercamon stated that a 'man who has lost faith in love can hardly be courtly' (I, l. 57–58). Around 1185, Andreas Capellanus, a priest from the court of King Philip Augustus, wrote a *Treatise on Love* in Latin, drawing on Ovid and for the most part a parody. He nevertheless wandered here and there into serious and grave matters, for instance when he claimed that there 'is no kindness or courtliness in this world which does not gush forth from the spring of love, the origin and cause of every good' (I, 6, §49). Likewise, in the early thirteenth century, Guillaume de Lorris wrote that 'love is a most courtly disease' (l. 2177). The gist of those texts and many others is that there is an elegant, refined way of loving, but also of speaking, dressing, or warring.

The patient, enduring, and meek lover

Fin'amor was practised in, and spread out from, the courts that brought together the well-born, the entourage of kings, princes and lords, and thus it pertained to aristocratic distinction. Because it is elitist, its pearls cannot possibly be cast before swine, in accordance with the ancient dichotomy between 'courtliness', 'urbanity', and 'civility' on the one hand, and 'rusticity' or 'villeiny' on the other. Always the cynic, Andreas Capellanus writes: 'No peasant can be found who is able to serve at the court of love; only because of the force of their instincts do they indulge in Venus's works, like horse or mule' (I, 11, §1).

This social disdainfulness towards vulgar love is supplemented in these authors by another consideration with more moral connotations, one

which may concern not only peasants but those few noblemen who debased themselves by loving in such an uncouth way. Around 1140, the troubadour Bernard de Ventadour wrote of the folly, bordering on loutishness, of those who scorn true love: 'Love is blamed by fools because of their madness, but this does not harm it, for it can never be debased, unless it is vulgar' (II, l. 15–18). In her *Lais*, his contemporary Marie de France inveighs against 'villeins who court women' (I, l. 488), who mock the wound love leaves in the heart, who parade and boast of their conquests: 'This is not love, but folly, malignity and debauchery' (l. 491–2). In short, frivolity, wantonness, or lust have nothing in common with courtly love, which is ruled by the highest standards of behaviour.

Perfect love requires self-control, without which it becomes 'common', 'villainous', or 'vulgar', even in a lord. Reference to its bipolar nature, which may cause it to swing from better to worse, shows up around 1180 in the knight-writer Hartmann von Aue's commentary on the misfortune of an earl who coveted Enide, Erec's legitimate wife. 'Mighty Love taught him to lie and took his common sense away; for a perspicacious man, who would never have been caught otherwise, may be ensnared by it. Many a man would never have lifted a finger to do harm, had Love left him in peace [...]. No one it holds sway over is left with enough strength to flee from it. Love, however, does not forsake him who serves it faithfully and rightly, and it rewards him for his suffering, provided he behaves more honourably than the earl, who did not prove strong enough. It was Dame Love who instilled dishonourable thoughts into him. That is why he decided to take a good man's wife' (l. 3688–721). Love, here personified—a common allegorical process in mediaeval literature—reveals its negative aspect. Attracted as he was, the earl, whose initial qualities Hartmann elsewhere unhesitatingly praises, simply found himself led astray. As he became a stranger to the discipline that would normally have regulated his behaviour according to the rules of courtliness, he yielded to his basest drives and lost his self-control. And yet he belonged to the aristocracy of the blood, and was thoroughly predisposed to good before he let himself be corrupted.

For Hartmann von Aue, *fin'amor*, fair love, which the earl was unable to attain, includes service, faithfulness, honesty, suffering, honour, and firmness. In twelfth- and thirteenth-century poetry and romances, the same qualities define courtly love, which implies, first and foremost, constancy. 'Your love would be proper, should it remain steady for both of you', says Marie de France in her *Lais* (I, l. 451–452). Time may fly, days, months, and years may go by, Bernard de Ventadour sings, but 'my desire is still the same and unchanged for the one I have wanted and still

want, but whom I have never enjoyed' (XLIV, l. 1–7). Not only is this troubadour's love long-lasting, it is also exclusive: 'I have forsaken all others for her to whom I am so attracted' (XXVI, l. 9–10). And a poem by Arnaut de Mareuil goes on to say: 'By no means can I divide my heart. In my opinion, he who claims love in two places is a deceiver and a liar in both' (X, l. 3336). These protestations of loyalty form an integral part of the discourse on courtly love.

Submission to the lady is not just a matter of faithfulness, exclusiveness, or constancy, it demands blind obedience. Around 1180, Chrétien de Troyes' *The Knight of the Cart* takes its name from the vehicle on which the condemned were driven to the pillory or scaffold, to the jeering of the bystanders. It is for the queen's love that Lancelot of the Lake agrees to mount it; but she then holds it against him that he hesitates for a couple of steps. Later, she commands him to take part in a tournament in a cowardly fashion and to allow himself to be defeated even though he is far superior to the other combatants. The despotic queen thus inflicts the worst humiliations upon Lancelot, who is so madly in love with her that he forgets his reputation, perhaps the most precious possession of a mediaeval nobleman. Chrétien knew Bernard de Ventadour well, and the latter may have influenced him with the idea of absolute renunciation of oneself for the love of the lady. Indeed, what the troubadour advocates is the lover's faultless submission to his mistress, in the strongest sense of the word. 'I am a prisoner of love. A Lady may take great pity on a man thus enraptured. Fair Lady, I ask for nothing but that you would take me as your servant. I shall serve you as if you were a good lord, whatever the reward. Behold me under your command, with my heart sincere, humble, joyful, and courteous. You are no lion or bear, to kill me if I surrender to you' (I, l. 46–56), he wrote.

Some mediaevalists argue that absolute obedience to the lady is secondary in comparison to the submission owed by the troubadour, a young unmarried warrior, to the service of her husband. This would be much more important than his feelings for the wife, who in this view is considered a mere 'extra', or a lure, through whom the discipline of feudal loyalty to the lord is inculcated in the lover. At the centre of a 'male' Middle Ages, courtly love would then be 'homosocial', something that occurred exclusively between warriors: some are married to the 'mistress' and command, while the others, fantasizing about her, obey.¹⁰¹ Attractive as it

¹⁰¹ Marchello-Nizia, 'Amour courtois, société masculine'; Duby, 'À propos de l'amour'; Burns, 'The Man Behind the Lady'.

may look, this hypothesis does not seem to hold up, given its remoteness from the discourse of the authors of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries themselves, who only view *fin'amor* within a strictly heterosexual context and hardly speak at all of the relations between lords and vassals.

The lover's humility is but another aspect of his detachment. Indeed, he should be ready to forsake everything for his lady, beginning with his honour, and even more so his riches. Love, since it is only based on will and abides by inner morals, must be pure, devoid of all material considerations, and even external to the lovers themselves.¹⁰² Rudolf von Ems, in his *Willehalm von Orlens* (1238), has the heroine voicing a sentiment which summarizes well this disinterestedness: 'I would rather marry this noble, gallant Lord, even though he be poor, than the King of Asia' (l. 10261–4). A few decades earlier, Bernard de Ventadour had written: 'I would rather give all the gold and silver in the world, if I possessed it, for my Lady to know I love her sincerely' (*finamen*, I, l. 38–41). The trouvère Conon de Béthune (c. 1150–c. 1220) shows even greater generosity, as he claims he would be ready to leave Paradise itself, if he were there, to return to his lady (VII, l. 4–5).

Detachment, synonymous with self-control, is always *de rigueur*, including in the carnal possession of the loved one. 'So great and authentic is her worth that, should I be blessed by God with permission to kiss her lightly, I would rather serve her and lose, than serve another who might reward me much more' (VI, l. 29–32), wrote the troubadour Guilhem Ademar around 1200. To be sure, the union of hearts does not necessarily rule out bodily union, and seldom does courtly love suggest the flesh should be sacrificed altogether on some platonically ethereal altar. It does not, however, make sexual pleasure the indispensable goal of amorous conquest, as was the case in Ovid's most influential Latin work and in a number of twelfth- and thirteenth-century texts that adopted a licentious or merely erotic tone far removed from the standards of courtliness. However, *fin'amor* does hold desire at bay, fulfilment being long—and sometimes indefinitely—delayed. It builds up a dialectic opposition between renunciation and satisfaction, idealism and realism. The heroes of romance struggled between these two extremes, as did poets writing in the first person and all those who discussed amorous casuistry—often after hearing a lyrical song or a tale at court.¹⁰³ The balancing act between flesh and spirit is much too subtle for the standards of *fin'amor* to be imple-

¹⁰² Schnell, 'L'amour courtois', 355–358.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 97–98, 332–333 et 342.

mented unhesitatingly in the behaviour of the knight and the courted lady, thus leading to endless curial debates.

The tension between reason and sensuality is at the very heart of courtly love. Mere carnal attraction should be overcome, since its ultimate satisfaction might put an end to the amorous quest. Troubadours say this sublimation seems like folly to common men, who cannot or will not check their instincts. It is only slowly, incrementally, that the perfect lover gains access to the lady. *Dompna vos m'aves et amors*, an anonymous *langue d'oc* poem written around 1250, formalized the four stages the suitor goes through when approaching the lady: *fenhedor* ('shy swain'), *pregador* ('suitor'), *entendedor* ('accepted suitor'), and *drutz* ('lover'). Further on, the song claims that the initiative is the woman's privilege, as she grants the suitor permission to reach the next stage, encouraging him first to voice his passion, then granting him a token of love, like a belt or a glove, then kissing him, and ultimately giving herself to him.

A long delay refines desire, making it pure and loyal. This patience that endures demands effort, but one that is all the better accepted as it stems from love. 'I wish the whole world could praise me for one quality: being able to endure suffering better than anybody else. Should a woman torment me into being unable to keep silent day and night, I am of such an amiable disposition that I take her hatred as a spring of joy. But alas, how I suffer!', wrote Reinmar von Hagenau (c. 1150–1210), a *Minnesänger* at the court of the duke of Austria (p. 315, l. 7–12). Around 1200, the troubadour Blondel de Nesle from Picardy composed a song in which he described the same contradictory feeling in numerous oxymora: 'pleasant martyrdom', 'sweet death', 'delicious torment' (XV, l. 9, 11, 19), thus vindicating Bernard de Ventadour, who once said: 'So gently does this love hurt me with a sweet feeling in my heart that I die of pain a hundred times a day, only to be brought back to life by joy another hundred times. My pain is so beautiful that it is worth more than any tranquillity. And since it is so sweet to me, how immensely more worthy will such tranquillity be after the grief!' (I, l. 25–32). The melancholy fostered by the uncertain feelings of the lady then becomes the very essence of amorous exaltation. It transfigures Bernard de Ventadour so much that 'storm and tempest' only increase his 'happiness' and 'frost' looks to him like 'flowers, and snow like vegetation' (IV, l. 4–12). His metaphors, better than any argument, express in fine detail the same paradox of the lover's pains and joys.

Not only does the lover have to go through ordeals on account of his lady's vacillations, but he also has to foil the cabals of the *lauzangiers*, a

term that may be translated as ‘flatterers’, but which also refers to those enviers, intriguers, gossip-mongers, and slanderers who are bent on thwarting the conquest. They will denounce him to his lady’s husband, denounce him to her as unfaithful, or spread vile gossip against his honour. In the face of such attacks, discretion becomes vital. ‘Should your lady secretly grant her favours to you, serve her secretly, without boasting’, is Amanieu de Sescas’s advice to the squire (l. 246–9). This secret is often inherent in the love affair, which itself perhaps becomes some sort of retaliation against the oppressive court milieu, which is intent on foiling the love scheme.

It is by isolating themselves that the lovers make inner progress. In the process, they protect themselves from the fawning corruption that might undermine their love.¹⁰⁴ The secrecy of some forms of courtly love marginalize their protagonists. In extreme cases, they will drive them away from the civilized life of the court and into the wild woods. According to Bérout, Tristan and Iseult take refuge in the forest of Morrois, where they live in a makeshift cabin off what they gain by hunting and gathering fruit (l. 1275–305). Their rejection of the world for the ‘desert’ (l. 1305) is indeed reminiscent of the Stoics’ *Exeat aula* or even the lifestyle chosen by the hermit Ogrin, who hears Tristan’s confession in his forest (l. 1362–422). Tristan is not granted absolution, however, for he will not—or cannot, under the sway of the love potion—leave Iseult. Admittedly, Tristan and Ogrin did not despise the secular world for the same reasons, and eremitism should not be confused with eroticism. Living on love and fresh air is quite different from the anchorite’s *contemptus mundi*. It is still the case, however, in the literature of the time that flight or confinement are tokens of the elitism of those few chosen beings who are prepared to make any sacrifice for a love they hold to be perfect in its sincerity and purity.

The risks that the lovers have to face perfect their relationship. These are all the more perilous as adultery is sometimes severely punished, and always ruins the guilty wife’s reputation for ever.¹⁰⁵ The narrative scheme of Bérout’s *Tristan* rests almost entirely on the way the lovers contrive to fool King Mark and his three wicked courtiers, whose accusations could send Iseult to the stake. Bérout’s work is self-confessedly fiction. But it was history that the chronicler Roger of Howden claimed to be writing when he reported that in 1175 Philippe, count of Flanders, sentenced Gau-

¹⁰⁴ Jaeger, *The Origins of Courtliness*, 241.

¹⁰⁵ Bumke, *Courtly Culture*, 392–394, Schnell, ‘L’amour courtois’, 352.

tier de Fontaines, a member of his court, to death for his affair with his wife Elisabeth de Vermandois (d. 1183). He had him cudgelled, then hung by his feet with his head in a sewer. Several troubadours also refer to the event, which in their view was a perfect example of a lover's devotion, but also of cowardice on the part of his lady, who proved unable to defend him. Yet the anecdote is fictitious: Gilbert of Mons (d. 1225), a Flemish chronicler who was a closer contemporary, reports the peaceful death of Gautier in 1183 at the Cistercian monastery of Aulne, where he had retired as a cleric.¹⁰⁶

According to his biography written around 1240, and earlier mentioned as an illustration of the tensions between the upper and lower nobility which smouldered beneath courtly love, the retribution suffered by the troubadour Guilhem de Cabestany proved as ruthless as that of Gautier de Fontaines. The *vida* relates how his rival Raimond de Château-Roussillon 'tore his heart out, and had it brought to the palace by a squire, roasted and dressed in pepper sauce, and served to his wife for lunch' (XCIV). When he told her what it was she had just eaten, the poor woman replied that she would never again taste such delectable food. The enraged husband then chased her, sword in hand, and she threw herself over the balcony. Like the previous story, this one too is fictitious. In fact, Guilhem was among the warriors who fought in the battle of Navas de Tolosa in 1212, long after Raimond's death.¹⁰⁷ The ancient narrative motif of the consumed heart, one familiar throughout Western literature, combines the fantasy of absorbing the lover's flesh and fear of punishment for the transgression of wedlock. It also echoes the dangers, whether real or imaginary, which accompanied courtly love in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Perfecting oneself through love

'This love saddens me, whether I'm awake or dreaming in my sleep, but then my joy is marvellous' (*joy meravelhos*, I, l. 15–17), says Jaufre Rudel (d. 1148), lord of Blaye. In truth, 'joy' is a poor translation for *joy* in the original *langue d'oc*, a word that almost all troubadours use to refer to the state of enthusiastic ecstasy to which love transports them. The noun is masculine, and perhaps a two-fold Latin etymology lies behind it, a com-

¹⁰⁶ Harvey, 'Cross-Channel Gossip'.

¹⁰⁷ Riquer, *El Corazón devorado*, 51–60.

bination of *gaudium* ('joy') and *joculum* ('game, pleasure', in the diminutive). Born of the spring *reverdie*, the supreme delight of *joy*, which leads *fin'amor* to its climax, is a vital principle for the troubadour, who not only experiences passion but involves himself fully in its achievement. It is also the power that urges him to compose and sing.¹⁰⁸ It is inextricably interlinked with 'youth' (*joven*, in *langue d'oc*), which sums up all courtly qualities in love and in war. For Bertran de Born, who uses the word forty-three times and devotes a whole song to it, it refers more particularly to generosity, the keystone to conviviality among the nobility.¹⁰⁹ To *joy* and *joven*, one should add *mezura*, the third virtue of accomplished love as sung of by the troubadours. As it is a part of courtliness, 'measure' is indispensable. It implies perfect self-control, the quality which attracts the favours of the worthy lady whom one means to conquer. This self-control is all the more necessary as the path which leads to winning the lady is long. It gives to the troubadour a sense of duty and of discipline to serve her.¹¹⁰

Courtly love perfects the lover. In the early twelfth century, the troubadour Marcabru declares: '*Fin'amor*, source of all virtue, you illuminate the whole world!' (XL, l. 36–7). Or again: 'Even under oath I would never believe that wine does not come from grapes, or that love does not improve man' (XIII, l. 25–7). A generation later, Aimeric de Peguilhan elaborates: 'Love makes the villein polished, the idiot pleasant in conversation, the miser generous, and the thief honest. With it, the demented become wise, the clumsy polite, and the arrogant amiable and humble' (XV, 18–21). His contemporary Guilhem de Cabestany says the same thing, albeit *a contrario*: 'However elegant he may be, a man who does not love a lady becomes unpleasant for all' (III, l. 45–7). Courtly love, in short, makes a man pleasant, improves his conviviality, and thus facilitates concord within the aristocracy. Refinement originates from women, who spur men to elegance, good manners, and propriety. This idea has been current in the West since antiquity at least, and it still remains dominant in some aspects of our views on gender.

Some of the verses in the same song by Guilhem de Cabestany do not fit well with our traditional gender division, which grants women the power to placate men's violence. On the contrary, they assert: 'Ladies always make the most cowardly men gallant' (l. 43–44). That the love of a

¹⁰⁸ Camproux, *Le Joy d'amor des troubadours*.

¹⁰⁹ Gouiran, 'Introduction' to his ed. of Bertran de Born, CXV–CXVII.

¹¹⁰ Wettstein, *L'idéal des troubadours*.

woman instils courage in combat is a constant motif in twelfth- and thirteenth-century literature. The Occitan romance *Jaufre* (1180–1220) speaks thus of the positive consequences of love on the warriors guarding the city walls of Montbrun. ‘Every man knows about love and believes he loves the finest lady. That is why they are all so gallant, valiant, educated, and pleasant. They are marvellous knights, for love makes a man more gallant, joyous, and generous’ (l. 3099–115). These verses of *Jaufre* extend to war the positive effects of love, which is not only limited to manners and courtliness. In 1155, Wace’s *Brut* formulated, in a redundant way, the idea of the military daring that is inspired by women: ‘The delights of love are good, and for the sake of his lady a young knight performs deeds of chivalry’ (*funt chevaliers chevaleries*, l. 10771–10772). A century later, the same alliterative word play is found in a didactic poem called *Frauenehre*, written by a Franconian jongleur known to us only by his nickname Stricker (‘Knitter’): ‘Only thanks to women can knights live chivalrously’ (*Ritter Ritterlichen lehent*, l. 642–643). Lastly, Ulrich von Etzenbach, in his German romance *Wilhelm von Wenden* (c. 1290), includes courage among the long list of qualities that women, ‘source of all perfection and good’, inspire in men, ‘making victory over the enemy possible’ (l. 1418–1430).

At the end of the twelfth century, Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan offers this advice to the young knight intent on winning a woman’s heart: ‘It is befitting that a lover who maintains love should be first in pursuit and last in flight [...]. Should your spear fail you, draw your sword forthwith. Smite blows so mighty that God, Hell, and Paradise may hear them. Thus, since becoming a knight, have I conquered many a Lady, beautiful and good’ (l. 557–578). Around the same time, the Bohemian Wolfram von Eschenbach’s *Willehalm* develops, in an exhortation addressed to the hero, the motif of the woman as the warrior’s recreation: ‘Let each knight put his whole heart into battle for the reward of women. Thus will he learn how ladies rejoice at the sight of spears piercing shields, and how they comfort them in distress. It is therefore a double reward that lies ahead: paradise and the favours of noble women’ (§299, l. 19–27). Women may then urge knights to war, proudly acknowledging their courage and learning of their high feats. The honour gained by suitors enhances the ladies’ reputations.

The festive context of tournaments, which bring together aristocratic males and females, was particularly favourable to courtly love and the warlike exaltation they foster. Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *History of the Kings of Britain* claims, speaking about King Arthur’s court, that ‘courtly women only deigned to give their love to those who had thrice proven

their gallantry in fighting'. The passage was written in 1136–1137, and the emergence of courtly love in the context of battle appears a premature motif, as does the mention of the tournament which takes place in front of female spectators: 'The knights put together a kind of diversion in imitation of a fight on horseback; the ladies, placed on the top of the walls as spectators, cast their amorous glances in a sportive manner at the knights, the more to encourage them' (§157). In the early thirteenth century, Jean le Trouvère's *History of William the Marshal* tells of the hero's political ascent, which owed much precisely to his feats in such jousts. Describing the songs and dancing that enlivened these events, Jean states that warriors 'improve on the arrival of ladies, as they feel their strength and spirit multiplied twofold, as well as their boldness and courage' (l. 3466–3468).

As the joust is warfare in miniature, it not merely grants women a decorative role as spectators, they also make and unmake the contestants' reputations. In *The Story of the Grail*, two damsels in the audience call Gawain a merchant or a money changer—the ultimate insult for an aristocrat—because he avoids a tournament. They term him a cattle trader or a usurer, driving his animals or transporting his chests full of silverware and earthenware, and merely posing as a knight in order to be exempted from tolls. Therefore, they predict he will be hanged like a good for nothing. Chrétien de Troyes emphasizes the devastating effect this insult has on Gawain: 'He feels shame and irritation [...]. He is right in thinking that if he does not enter the tournament as agreed, he will be tarnished, and his lineage after him' (l. 5094–5101). Honour won or lost in tournaments concerns not only individuals but their whole families for several generations. Gawain, who cannot bear such a stain, enters the fray. He first ties on his coat of mail the sleeve of the younger sister of one of his detractors, for she had steadfastly defended him from her sister's insults.

In the *Lai of the Dolorous Knight*, Marie de France tells of a lady who had four suitors who flaunted her love-tokens—a 'pennon, or sleeve, or ring'—and who used her name as a rallying cry (l. 69–70). During a tournament in which they fight for her, three are slain while the fourth loses his manhood, hence the title of the lay. Hartmann von Aue's description of Erec's three escutcheons incorporates the love motif: 'He wore the most beautiful sleeves of sable (*zibelin*, 'black' in heraldry). A good-sized silver buckle and clasp covered it almost fully, tying the sleeve to its top. Inside, on the upper part of the escutcheon was a painted lady' (l. 2304–16). Likewise, the monk William of Malmesbury complains about the debauchery of William IX of Aquitaine, who was excommunicated for deserting his legitimate wife for the viscountess of Châtellerault, whom he

had had painted on his shield (§439). Quite different is the tone adopted by Geoffrey of Monmouth, a colleague of William of Malmesbury, when he claims that King Arthur asked that 'on his shield be painted the picture of the blessed Mary, mother of God', whose name was to become his war cry (§147). The Virgin Mary on Arthur's shield is an attested tradition in Wales, going back to the ninth century at least, which partly explains its transfer from the amorous to the religious context.¹¹¹

Faithfulness, or service, are important qualities not only of courtly love; *fides* in Latin ('faith') and *servitium* ('service') also refer to the relationship of vassal to lord. Between 1188 and 1195, the troubadour Gaucelm Faidit mixed amorous and feudal elements as he lamented regarding his lady Marie, viscountess of Ventadour, whom he had left in her native Limousin: 'My Lady [*midons*, 'my Lord'], who holds my heart in pledge (*gatge*), I pray her, as he who begs, that she should not have a fickle heart for me. That she should not believe the words of those gossip-mongers (*lauzangers*) who claim I have turned to another. It is in good faith I sigh, and I love her without deceit (*ses enjan*) [...]. Never have I gone astray from the path that leads to the one to whom I have given my heart, after paying her homage. My intent is never to give up serving her. Even if we should fall out, I am hers and by no means can I leave her or ask another. There is nothing in my heart I want more. That is why I court her, with my hands joined, humbly' (*la reblan, las mas jointas, humilian*, XLIII, l. 40–65).

A number of words and expressions from Gaucelm Faidit's song are echoed in pledges of faithfulness, documents of homage, and feudal conventions, and indeed uttered in public ceremonies. Scribes would transcribe them in Latin on parchment, making them easily accessible to present-day historians. For instance, *midons*, which Gaucelm uses in the masculine, is the equivalent of *meus dominus* in feudal contracts, *gatge* of *pignus*, *ses enjan* of *sine engano*, *servir* of *servire*, *humilian* of *humiliter*... *Reblan* is a verbal form derived from *blandimentum* ('favour', 'consent'). The homage, paid with joined hands, is reminiscent of the gestures performed countless times by lords and their vassals in order to express a mutual contract: lord protects vassal in exchange for armed service. Even the word *amor* often describes, in charters, the nature of these feudo-vassalic relations. Sometimes, it yields to *drudaria* or *drudum*, Germanic words whose Romanized form usually means physical love in troubadours' songs.¹¹²

¹¹¹ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 84, 136.

¹¹² Cheyette, *Ermengarde de Narbonne*, 238–242.

The use of the vocabulary, rites, and legal realities of vassalage seems to be one of the most characteristic elements of the love sung by troubadours. Feudalism only concerns the knights, a warrior elite. Indeed, the homage the knight pays to his lord is not necessarily a humiliation for him. It is even honourable and prestige-enhancing for the lower nobility, whose ritual allegiance to castellans proves that they belong to the restricted and prestigious group of mounted warriors. It is the whole paradox of military service, which 'liberates', since no peasant, even less so if he is a serf, can perform faith and homage. The same contradiction is found in courtly love, where the lady contributes to the knight's personal progress, thus making him more free.¹¹³ Contrary to the other qualities in *fin'amor*, which, like constancy, exclusivity, and endurance, are unchanging through centuries and can be studied in an anthropological perspective, the use of the vocabulary and gestures of feudalism concerns a precise period of history with its peculiar context. It goes back to the practices of mediaeval nobility.

Courtly love can sometimes flourish between two young unmarried persons, or between spouses. The clerk Chrétien de Troyes relates, for instance, the joys and sufferings and the perfecting in amorous trial of Alexander and Soredamour, of Cligès and Fénice and of Yvain and Laudine, all legitimate or potential spouses. Erec and Enide, a married couple, rediscover their mutual love in knightly waywardness, which also re-endows the husband with the warlike youthful courage he had temporarily lost through his wedding. To the libidinous count who enquires of her link with Erec, Enide replies that she is at once his 'wife and his lady-love' (l. 6448), in other words his legitimate spouse before God and men, but also his *fin'amor* secret mistress. Chrétien openly criticizes Iseult's double life. He only highlights, in *The Knight of the Cart*, the adultery within Lancelot's passion for the queen, but he does claim that the motif had been imposed on him by Marie, countess of Champagne, and subtly demonstrates its subversiveness.¹¹⁴ Be it as it may, *The Knight of the Cart* is jarringly different from his other romances, where marriage appears as the ultimate goal, even the apex, of courtly love.

Andreas Capellanus has an altogether different conception of courtly love than his contemporary Chrétien de Troyes. He writes about marriage: 'I am quite surprised to see the word 'love' usurped and applied to marital affection, which spouses are bound to by matrimony. It is, however, obvi-

¹¹³ Scaglione, *Knights at Court*, 90–91.

¹¹⁴ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur (550–1250)*, 270, 282–285, 327–332.

ous that love has no place between husband and wife' (I, 6, §367). Elsewhere, he attributes a similar sentence to Marie de Champagne, the sponsor of *The Knight of the Cart*, and to her mother Eleanor of Aquitaine, whose divorce, second marriage, and alleged affairs were universally lambasted: 'Love has no power whatsoever over spouses' (II, 17, §42). Like Andreas, troubadours set no store by conjugal affection. They always claim to be in love with aristocratic ladies who were in practice married to someone else. In the early thirteenth century, Gui d'Ussel summarizes this view in his debate (*tenso*) with his cousin Elias: 'Through the lady, worth progresses, and through the wife, it is lost; one is praised for courting one's lady, but mocked for courting one's wife' (l. 21–24).

Two types of reasons, psychological and sociological, may be adduced for the institutionalization, at least poetically speaking, of adultery. On the one hand, within the nobility marriage was based on patrimonial imperatives that left children with hardly any free choice regarding their future spouses. It involved a lifetime contract, pursuant to which bride and bridegroom owed each other everlasting faithfulness. On the other hand, the lady remained, for troubadours, a demanding mistress, who only granted her favours willingly to him who always strived to deserve them.¹¹⁵ The nubile girl had little, if any, legal existence: only the legally wedded lady was at the head of a lordship and could receive homage. This superiority in feudal hierarchy secured her the amorous service of the knight, who courted her according to codes largely borrowed from vassalage. She held him in subjugation, so that he was ready for any sacrifice *midons* would care to demand of him.

Classical knowledge and courtly love

Many modern scholars hold courtly love to have been little more than the creation of twelfth- and thirteenth-century troubadours, romance writers, and poets. In 1936, in his book on the medieval tradition of love allegory, C. S. Lewis noted that mediaeval writers 'discovered or invented, or were the first to express, for the first time that romantic species of passion which English poets were still writing about in the nineteenth century [...]. Compared with this revolution, the Renaissance is a mere ripple on the surface of literature' (p. 4). We are indeed, he went on to say, witnessing the emergence of 'real changes in human sentiment [...]'—there are

¹¹⁵ Lazar, *Amour courtois et fin'amors*, 61.

perhaps three or four in recorded history—but I believe that they occur, and that this is one of them’ (p. 11). Four years later, Sidney Painter claimed that ‘Love and lust are as old as the human race, but *fin’amor* was essentially a product of the Middle Ages’ (p. 96). A similar point was made by Henri-Irénée Marrou, using a classicist’s image, in the chapter of his 1971 book, *The Troubadours*, significantly entitled ‘Love, a twelfth-century invention’: ‘Like Athena leaping fully grown and armed from her father’s brain, the art of the troubadours emerges all of a sudden, fully mature [...]. In this case, we have leapt, without any dawn, from night to full daylight’ (p. 110). According to Colin Morris, ‘no previous society [before the twelfth century] had formulated courtly love as an ideal by which it lived’ (1972, p. 108). More recently, Michel Zink suggests that ‘the assumed necessary link between courtliness and love is an innovation of Romance letters, first appearing in the troubadours’ writings, and which is all the more remarkable as nothing in the ideology or mores of the times seemed to impose it’ (p. 102). References by philosophers, historians, and philologists all pointing to the novelty of *fin’amor* could be further multiplied.

Some may find the above quotations somewhat cursory. To which a ready reply might be that love, like any anthropological reality, is always and everywhere the same; nevertheless, a transformation does occur in the twelfth century. Some of the features of courtly love, if only through the systematic way they are expressed, do look original: absolute submission to the lady, self-improvement through the exercise of patience, enjoyment of non-possession, feudo-vassalic codes, etc.

How can this novel amorous sensitivity be explained? Given that, as early as the late eleventh century, it was the troubadours who first adopted it, mediaevalists are at present examining Occitan civilization for clues as to what there may have favoured its emergence. What they identify is, on the one hand, the spread of Catharism, and, on the other, the proximity of the Arab-Hispanic world. Some scholars believe that the dualist heresy, outstandingly spiritual as it was, might have favoured a conception of love that makes the forsaking of flesh a supreme value. This ethic, moreover, contested both marriage and the dominant position of the Church in society, against which troubadours occasionally take a stand. Furthermore, and again according to these authors, the *fin’amor* model of pining to death for the lady would symbolize the soul breaking free from its prison of matter along the lines of metempsychosis.¹¹⁶ However, the assumption

¹¹⁶ Rougemont, *L’Amour et l’Occident*, 58–88; Nelli, ‘Le Catharisme’, Varga, ‘Peire Cardinal’.

fails to account for the fact that very few troubadours did in fact leave the Church to join the Catharist movement—which as it turns out was quite contemptuous of the woman's body these same troubadours constantly sang about.

The influence of Arabic poetry on the rise of courtly love would appear to be a more promising avenue of exploration than that of heresy. The knights of Southern France fought the Muslims in the Iberian peninsula, but also in the Middle East. In the course of those campaigns, they certainly listened to Arabic songs on *wadd* ('noble love'), which were sometimes translated into Romance. There are numerous motifs common to this Arabic poetry and to the troubadours' *cansos*: the grief of lost love, *joy* (or *surûr*), *joven* (or *siba*), *cortesia* (or *zarf* or *adab*), *senhals* ('nicknames') which preserve secrets, spring gardens of delight—the list goes on. Even the Arabic verb *t-r-b*, which means both pleasure and song, shows a striking phonetic likeness with *trobar* ('find', 'compose poems' in *langue d'oc*), a coinage that cannot possibly be derived from classical Latin. A serious obstacle remains, however: homosexual or slavery nature of the love sung in the Arab world. This seems far remote from the femininity exclusively desired by troubadours. Even more problematic is the love for slaves celebrated by Arabic poetry, which is indeed diametrically opposed to the troubadours' worship of ladies of higher social rank.

That the lady should be, in the one case, socially higher, and in the other, lower than her suitor is not without consequences for courtly love. It reflects the yawning gap that separates the two aristocratic societies: the Arab-Muslim *khassa* and the Christian nobility. On the one side, an urban civilization of emirs, high civil servants, soldiers freed from slavery or paid mercenaries which through an efficient tax system controls a genuine state, bureaucratic and tribute-collecting, with centralizing decision-making and coercive means. On the other, an old castle-based aristocracy and its armed vassals, possessing lordships or fiefs, inspired in battle by a chivalrous ideology, which negotiates with the King as peers, and takes its power from him. Most troubadours belonged to this group of noble warriors, and it was they who set the conventions of courtly love. *Fin'amor* was first and foremost feudal, which is why it was expressed in terms of pledges of allegiance, homage, or loyal service. In short, it is impossible to define Western courtly love outside the feudo-vassalic nature of absolute submission to the lady.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁷ Aurell, '*Fin'amor*, *wadd* et féodalité'.

Or should we perhaps seek the origin of courtly love in the twelfth-century intellectual renaissance as well as in feudalism? ‘Clerks might be said to have been its initiators,’ wrote Edmond Faral in 1913 (p. 195). He goes on to quote a verse from *Phyllis and Flore*, a long Latin poem composed around 1150, which Faral claims to contain ‘historical truth’: ‘The clerk knows more than anyone about love. It is through him that the knight was made into a devotee of Venus’ (§41, l. 2–3). This scholarly view of courtly love is in line with the positivism claimed by Faral, whose impressive body of work purports to demonstrate the exclusively Latin sources of mediaeval literature in the vernacular, composed by an elite made up of cultured clerks impervious to folk tales and oral tradition. In his view, the sole reading of classics altered by itself ‘the conception of love, [...] which became more complicated, and in a sense more refined’ (p. 194). Ovid, the ‘master of love’ is a case in point, as twelfth-century French romances borrowed numerous motifs and situations from him (p. 157).

In 1966 Reto R. Bezzola reformulated the Latin hypothesis in *La Société féodale et la transformation de la littérature de cour* (pp. 275–316), which was one of the volumes in his encyclopaedic work, *Origines et la formation de la littérature courtoise en Occident*. According to Bezzola, William IX, duke of Aquitaine, invented *fin’amor* out of rivalry with Robert d’Arbrissel (1047–1117), a hermit whose preaching attracted numerous aristocratic ladies, beginning with the wife whom the duke himself had deserted, as well as one of his daughters. The reformist hermit extolled the superior spirituality of women to the point of entrusting them with the running of Fontevraud, the abbey he had founded at the intersection of Anjou, Poitou, and Touraine, which brought together—albeit with compulsory arrangements for the separation of the sexes—monks and nuns. Courtly love advocated an altogether different kind of obedience to the lady, and was formalized by William IX, who was intending to emancipate the lay aristocracy from the Church. What he did was turn inside out the affectionate Latin poems written for nuns and princesses by Loire-valley clerks like Baudri of Bourgueil (1046–1130), Marbode of Rennes (1035–1123), or Hildebert of Lavardin (1055–1133) and make them into refined love poems sung in Romance. In the next generation, what troubadours from Aquitaine—like Eble II, viscount of Ventadour, Marcabru, Cercamon, and Jaufre Rudel—did was no more than to develop the poetic motifs created *ab initio* by the duke whom they used to fraternize with at the court of Poitiers. The assumption is then that William IX’s ‘genial concept’ is to have made the lady ‘the inspirer of love, virtue, [and] court-

liness'. This 'mirage in which all the aspirations of the courtly society shine' is assumed to have 'delivered [the nobility] from the Church's yoke, which had previously held a monopoly over all spiritual life' (p. 314).

The continuous contact between Latin literature, which was transmitted by clerks throughout the whole Middle Ages, and courtly love is the central argument of the book by C. Stephen Jaeger, *Ennobling Love: In Search of a Lost Sensibility* (1999). In antiquity, and in the Middle Ages which inherited that attitude, love and friendship are not private or intimate matters as they are today. They have external manifestations, like eating at the same table, sleeping in the same bed, or the exchange of kisses in public, all of which testify to the possible political relation between a king and his councillors, or two princes having made an alliance with each other. They bring fame, dignity, and honour. They are particularly marked in the charismatic relation between master and disciple. Jaeger quotes a maxim by the educator Quintilian (c. 30–90), a frequent inspiration for mediaeval scholars: 'Pupils must love their teachers [...] considering them as fathers to their spirits rather than their bodies; this love will help them greatly in their studies' (p. 59). In the twelfth century, Guillaume de Conches added: 'The master, in a way, engenders wisdom in his disciple, thus endowing him with a higher being than that given by his real father' (p. 254). The dichotomy between life and soul, flesh and spirit, is crucial to understanding the vision of love developed at great length by Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero. For those philosophers, there exists a higher, noble, and detached form of friendship, free from the passion and greed of matter, both of which pertain to carnal love. This tradition is continued in mediaeval Christianity. Ultimately, as Jaeger argues, only men among them have the codified and public experience of the spiritual form of mutual friendship. It was only at a later period that chaste love for women was sung of by clerks in Latin poetry. In the twelfth century, 'the essential and traumatic change in the amatory customs of the nobility was the inclusion of women as major players in ennobling love relationships' (p. 82). According to Jaeger, this transformation was to lead to *fin'amor*.

The theories about the Latin roots of courtly love deserve in-depth analysis. For the sake of clarity, it is imperative—even if somewhat artificial—to separate the learned dimension from the religious one in the notion of a clerical culture. The former is embodied, on the one hand, in the idea of male public friendship or the disciple's friendship for his master having been transformed into *fin'amor*. This theory may account for a certain rhetoric of affection, but seems impossible to accept in full if in its

essence it is an exclusively heterosexual love that is to be analysed. Clerical learning is also evidenced in the influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, *Amores*, and *Ars Amatoria* on courtly love. Throughout the Middle Ages, monks and secular priests copied his books, often in expurgated versions lacking the more erotic passages, if only for the stylistic qualities of the verses. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, borrowings from his works turn up in the monologues in which the heroes and heroines of *langue d'oïl* romances analyse in detail the throes of their amorous feelings, struggling between acceptance or rejection of them, or balancing between hope and grief. Medieval authors borrow to his works certain metaphors of love: flame, arrow, disease, war, etc. An allegorical, personified Love, a frequent motif in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, was already present in Ovid's books. Finally, his advice on beauty treatments for women's faces is often repeated in mediaeval etiquette manuals. However, the fact remains that neither the Latin poet's libertine pose nor the frivolous tone of his recipes for seduction, which aim only at facilitating possession of the object of desire as quickly as possible, fit well with the ideals of *fin'amor*.

Quite different in nature is the clerical—in the strict religious sense—influence on courtly love. At least as early as the end of the eleventh century, the Church began insisting, with renewed emphasis, on the need for the free consent of the betrothed for a marriage to be valid. It was at that time that Urban II (1088-1099) enjoined King Sancho I Ramirez of Aragon and Navarre (1063-1094) to refrain from forcing his niece into a wedding she did not want. The Pope argued that 'where bodies make one, likewise spirits should make one'. His ruling became law and was copied fifteen years later into the *Decretum Gratiani* (XXXI, 2, 3). At the same period, according to Hariulf of Oudenbourg, Saint Arnulf (1048-1087), bishop of Soissons, gave the following reply to Gui, lord of Châtillon-sur-Marne, whose daughter had refused the man he had chosen as her husband: 'Canon Law strictly forbids the union of a woman to one she does not want; I therefore enjoin you to give the maiden to the man she loves, lest she be forced into impropriety' (§ 29). Lastly, Matthew Paris's *Chronica Majora* relates how Marguerite de Rivers (d. 1252), forcefully married in 1215 by King John to Falkes de Bréauté, the commander-in-chief of an army of mercenaries, nine years later took advantage of the disgrace and banning of her husband to publicly declare that 'she had never agreed to marry him, had been taken under duress, and had been wedded without consent' (t. 3, pp. 87-88). The archbishop of Canterbury immediately ruled her marriage to be void. In this lady's eulogy, the monk

of Saint Albans expatiates on the crime of the ‘tyrant John’ who put her in the clutches of Falkes, ‘forcefully uniting noblewoman to common man, pious woman to miscreant, beauty to ugliness. Quite elegant verse was composed on that wedding: “Law, love, and the concord of wedlock united them. But what law? What love? What wedlock? An illegitimate law, a hateful love, and a discordant concord”’ (t. 5, p. 323).

The origin of the Church’s stance on the autonomy of will of spouses-to-be lies in the notion that marriage should be free and interiorized, thus creating a bond determined by charity, a virtue that increases on account of that very choice. In the twelfth century, the boldest theologians, most notably Hugh of Saint Victor, went as far as suggesting that such spouses as have expressed free choice are thereby legally wedded, even if the union was never physically consummated.¹¹⁹ The above statements clearly undermine the authority of the head of the lineage, who was intent on using matrimonial strategies unrestrictedly to increase his house’s power and wealth. They may be said to be revolutionary, just as was the emergence of *fin’amor* at the same period, which was likewise a challenge to the power of the lord whose wife was courted by his knights. Indeed, the love of election (*electio*) or dilection (*dilectio*) fostered by this consent bears some likeness to the troubadours’ love, with its emphasis on a gentle approach towards the woman who is chosen consciously, deliberately, and spontaneously, and its rejection of forced marriage in genealogical strategies.

One final aspect of the privileged relation between clergy and women is worth mentioning: the way wives are supposed to positively transform their husbands’ moral conduct and religious life. In the *Summa Confessorum* (‘Guide to Confessors’, 1216) by Thomas, a subdeacon and ecclesiastical judge of Salisbury and rector of Chobham, of which at least a hundred manuscripts are preserved, it is mentioned that marriage is called *matrimonium* (from *mater*, ‘mother’) and not *patrimonium* (from ‘father’) because the woman suffers more in childbirth and raising children. It befalls to them to convert their husbands, as is clear from the chapter entitled ‘Women should be their husbands’ preachers’: ‘No priest can assuage a man’s heart as his wife can. This is why the husband’s sin may often be put down to the wife, whose lack of attention has prevented him from amending his ways. Therefore, with great tenderness should she speak to him while they embrace in their bedroom. Should he be hard or selfish, or oppress the poor, she should drive him towards mercy. Should he be a

¹¹⁹ Le Bras, ‘Mariage: la doctrine’, col. 2145–2146.

thief, towards hating theft. Should he be mean, let her make him open-handed, and let her give compensatory alms, secretly pilfered from their common possessions' (p. 375). Admittedly, pillow sermons are not exactly a twelfth-century innovation, as the practice seems to date back at least to Saint Paul's *Epistles*: 'For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband' (I Cor 7, 14). Neither does it, all at once, obliterate all the misogyny expressed in Western intellectual discourse from time immemorial. Nevertheless, the length and detail of Thomas of Chobham's advice to confessors, who will in turn pass it on to their female penitents, is altogether new. *Mutatis mutandis*, they are reminiscent of the profane notion of the perfecting of the lover by his lady, which is crucial in *fin'amor*.

Could it be the case that the alliance between priest and wife, the latter entering a kind of family or conjugal pastoral care under the guidance of the former, played a part in the development of courtly love? In a way, it would seem to be quite similar to the poems and long letters of spiritual guidance, or more trivially, friendly exchange or rhetorical exercises that Hildebert, Marbode, Baudri, and other Loire-valley scholars sent to noble ladies.¹²⁰ Like Thomas of Chobham, these clerics endowed women with special importance, as they believed them capable of influencing the conduct of the men in their households. Their attitude to them was therefore highly respectful, which resulted in greater moral authority being transferred to women over their entourage, which in turn increased, if only marginally, the informal power every wife might enjoy among her own kindred. Indeed, the increased value attributed to women's spirituality among the twelfth- and thirteenth-century clergy is most likely to have improved their social status. It is a period when the Marian cult experiences a new resurgence, as echoed in Bernard of Clairvaux's hymns and sermons. From a chronological point of view, the more feminine tone in Christianity coincides with the emergence of courtly love.

In spite of the special focus on women, it would seem impossible to identify the new forms of religiousness as the unique, decisive source of *fin'amor* as sung by the early troubadours. Indeed, there is a long-standing consensus among mediaevalists that it cannot possibly be a manifestation or even a consequence of twelfth-century mysticism, as expressed by the Cistercians Bernard de Clairvaux (1090–1153) or Guillaume de Saint-Thierry (1075–1148) in terms of pure, gratuitous, or disinterested love. On

¹²⁰ Bezzola, *La Société féodale*, 370–390, Dalarun, 'Dieu changea de sexe', 79–102; Tilliette, 'Hermès amoureux'.

the one hand, these monks wrote their mystical works after William IX and, the troubadours at his court had formalized the motifs of *fin'amor*, and on the other hand, what they advocate is a love of God that implies giving everything without expecting anything in return, least of all worldly gain, and even less so carnal union.¹²¹

Perhaps Bezzola was not so wrong after all when he analysed—in a way that was admittedly indemonstrable because of the unique example from which he extrapolated—William IX's poetry as a counter-model to the influence of the Loire-valley Latinist clerics and of Robert d'Arbrissel on his close feminine entourage. The excommunicated duke delighted in religious transgression and often adopted an openly anticlerical, lewd, and provocative tone which was hardly compatible with Christianity. Later troubadours softened his wording, and in their heterogeneous, 2,500-song corpus, some are indeed addressed to a fiancée or wife, but also to the Virgin Mary, in accordance with the strictest canons of ecclesiastical morals.

But in spite of many orthodox songs being neither lewd nor in favour of adultery, clerical suspicion remained unchanged. Peter of Blois, in one of his letters, reproaches his namesake nephew with composing profane poems in Latin, 'pointless ditties', 'weightless futilities and verbose fiction' in imitation of 'heathen authors', dealing with 'forbidden love' and 'boasting of seducing maidens', with the overall aim of corrupting youth. Peter urges him to follow his own example, since he gave up on 'frivolities and love verse for the charms of theology' (*ep.* 76). The testimony is as ambiguous as the figure of the typical twelfth-century clerk, who was both a Latinist fascinated by heathen rhetoric and a student of sacred studies who may go on to take the cloth. Admittedly, Peter's misgivings come late in life, and carry echoes of the love poetry he practiced in his youth. Yet his rejection is absolute for all that.

Like William IX, a number of writers preconized that courtly love was nothing but profane. They considered it incompatible with the teachings of the Church, and even openly subversive to it. A case in point is Aucassin's monologue in the romance *Aucassin and Nicolette* (c. 1200), which is worthy of extended quotation: 'What have I to do with Paradise? I don't wish to enter, but to have Nicolette my sweetest friend that I love so much: for only those people I will tell you of go to Paradise. There go the old priests and the old cripples and the limbless ones who squat all day and night in front of those altars and in those ancient crypts...' After adding the poor, the starving, and the ragged to his list, Aucassin claims he

¹²¹ Gilson, *La Théologie mystique*, 193–215.

particularly does not want to share Heaven with them. He prefers Hell, where ‘the fine scholars go, and the lovely knights who are slain in the jousts and in great wars, and the good soldier and the noble man’. ‘And there go the lovely courteous ladies who have two or three lovers as well as their lords, and there go the gold and the silver and ermine and miniver, and there go the harpers and singers and kings of this world: I will go with them, so long as I have Nicolette my sweetest love with me’ (p. 58). In short, several writers held *fîn’amor* to be a form of protest against the clerics—at least the more rigorist among them—and their teachings. Several elements of contemporary Church doctrine, especially marriage by consent, may have influenced courtly love. The Latin learning of the most cultured clerks likewise introduced phrases and imagery borrowed from the classics into courtly love. Yet its nature, all too often adulterous and openly sensual, fits uneasily with mediaeval Christianity.

The debate on knights and clerks in love

Aucassin and Nicolette has the ‘fair clerks’ consigned to his imaginary inverted Hell. There they meet ‘fair knights’, and especially ‘fair and courteous ladies’, whose numerous amorous adventures make it logical, at least for contemporary readers, that they should be found in this allegedly hellish place. The reader, however, may be surprised at finding members of the clergy in a garden of delights where love, overtly presented as adulterous, reigns supreme. If so, he should remember that ‘clerk’/‘cleric’ derive from the same root, and in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries referred at the same time to intellectuals or Latinists and to members of the Church hierarchy. In those days, it was necessary for a man to be tonsured, and thus acquire clerical status, if he wished to pursue higher studies. Very few, however, were subsequently ordained sub-deacons and thus forced into celibacy. Most of them married, in spite of the conventional wisdom in scholarly circles which held marriage to be a form of degeneration that prevented philosophers from fully indulging in their intellectual quest.

The fate of Peter Abelard is, in many respects, a case in point which illustrates the mindset and practices of scholarly circles. He was married, intimately if not secretly, to Heloise, who was for many years opposed to the matrimonial institutionalization of their love affair, claiming that it would be harmful to her lover’s prestige as scholar and teacher.¹²² Peter

¹²² Lobrichon, *Héloïse*, 183–206.

indulged in amorous poetry; indeed, in a letter to an anonymous friend he mentions the success of his compositions, most likely in Latin—none of which have survived to this day—that he wrote in honour of Heloise, who was so much on his mind that he would neglect his beloved studies: ‘Any originality I used to seek in those days was not in unravelling the secrets of philosophy, but in composing amorous songs. As you know, they are still well-known and sung in many a region, especially by those who enjoy leading a similar life to what mine used to be’ (*ep.* I, 4d). This passage is testimony to a then frequent form of clerical poetry which reproduced the same amorous motifs as troubadour songs or courtly romances.

Many clerks considered that their literary culture enhanced their courtliness. Their superiority in manners and conversation could even attract feminine esteem. The *Decasyllabic Alexander*, composed in Poitou around 1170, relates how King Philip of Macedonia had professors come to his court from all over Greece to initiate his son into astronomy, the seven arts, the great authors, board games, falconry, and the exercise of justice. ‘They also taught him to speak of love to the ladies in courtly fashion’ (l. 55), it is added. The anonymous author, most likely a clerk, seems to be claiming that bookish culture helps conversation with women. Mothers taught the alphabet to her children, most noble women read their psalter, and the ladies’ chambers was a space for literary performances. To sum up, women liked literature and this may justify the convergence between knowledge and gallantry. According to the *Decasyllabic Alexander* and other romances of the times, noblewomen were more attracted to cultured men than to the unlettered. By contrast, the squire who, according to Amanieu de Sescas, asks a knight for advice on how to win feminine affection cannot refrain from mentioning his mentor’s literary ignorance. ‘You, who are not lettered, know more than anyone about love’ (l. 28–29). It would not seem far-fetched to detect, reading between the lines, some sort of inferiority complex towards clerks, and an ensuing rivalry.

Even the ladies demanded culture of their friends. So can be seen, around 1100, in a collection of forty-nine short leonine hexameters in Latin known as the *Love Poems of Regensburg*, which was composed in the school of a nuns’ convent. The pupils belonged to the Bavarian high aristocracy, and they addressed their master, a clerk from Liège, and the young men who visit them, in language which is kindly, loving, or sometimes even erotic. These compositions are mostly stylistic exercises, but the search for the right word and perfect rhyme seldom precludes a straightforward declaration of love: ‘Please correct these little verses I present thee with, o my Master: I hold thy words for the Light of the Verb,

but I am in great pain for thou preferrest Bertha to me' (VI). Incidentally, these girls establish the classic link between rhetoric and good manners as they demand that their suitors 'improve in kindness and the courtliness of their conversation, and be refined in all things and adopt distinguished manners' (XVII, l. 10–11). They even consider themselves a vestal choir who wishes happiness 'only to such men as have acquired good fame for their manners as much as we have' (l. 16–17).¹²³ Meanwhile, half a century on, Marie de France and the *trobairitz*, those budding poetesses, made Latin culture and poetic creation into an ideal of high life, claiming that they civilize the mores of those who practice them. Their admiration, even if restrained by literary convention, was more directed to the Liège clerk than to the knights who court them in a way they deem awkward and whom they are intent on civilizing.

Another testimony to the complexity of relations between ladies, clerics, and courtliness is to be found in the *Service of Ladies* (1257) by the Styrian knight Ulrich von Liechtenstein (c. 1200–c. 1276), in which women and men engage in argument on the decline of aristocratic sociability, for which each side blames the other. The male discourse accuses women of being so steeped in piety that they 'behave like nuns' (§601, l. 17). With wimples that cover their foreheads down to their eyes, veils that conceal their cheeks or mouths, and chaplets as their only jewels, they are also blamed for spending night and day in church instead of dancing, and preferring doleful piety to the hearty welcome of men. The female retort is just as harsh: 'You have forsaken the service of ladies, and all you can do is brag' (§600, l. 15–16). Male rudeness and violence have become such that the women say they are afraid. Should they dress properly, their husbands will think they are being unfaithful. On the other hand, husbands reject them when they try to kiss them tenderly. They leave them at dawn to go hunting all day, then, come evening, they demand that their game be served to them, after which they begin to gamble and drink. Their wives stay up late for them, and when they stand up to greet them, the men do not even reply. They collapse into bed where they sleep like logs till morning. Since they are jealous and forbid their wives from having any contact with strangers, 'nothing remains but for her to devote herself with all her will and soul to God's service' (§609, l. 13–15). In this fictitious dialogue, piety, and therefore commerce with priests, chaplains, and young clerics, is the only channel of relief for these ladies, bitterly outraged as they are at the boorishness of their husbands.

¹²³ Dronke, *Women Writers*, 91–92, Jaeger, *Ennobling Love*, 74–148.

The rivalry between clerks and knights is rhetorically rooted in the ancient dialectic of *fortitudo* and *sapientia*, 'strength' and 'knowledge', each being personified in its own trade. In the 1100s, the *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, attributed to William of Conches, highlighted the need for men to serve society each according to his talent. More generally, Cicero's *De Officiis* expresses the same idea of the utility of personal vocation for the common good (I, 31 and 114). The originality of the *Moralium* lies in the more precise application of such a vocation to the first two orders of society: 'Should someone be weak of body, but clever and swift of mind, let him be destined not to knighthood, but to the study of letters. Should he, on the other hand, be strong and stupid (*hebes*), to chivalry and not to the study of letters' (p. 43, l. 20–22). This scholarly, if callous maxim, was picked up at the beginning of the thirteenth century by Alard de Cambrai, who, in the French adaptation of the *Moralium*, compared the clerk's meagre body to the knight's vigour and concluded: 'Very often the small man is more subtle than the large one' (l. 1702–1703). Alard went on to weigh the respective benefits of nature, which endows some with a strong body and some with the ability to obtain a wide culture (*norreture*), and concluded that, according to his studies, 'the small man becomes as strong as the large-bodied one' (l. 1725–1726). Unlike physical strength, intelligence, knowledge, and cunning are acquired rather than innate. They are all the more praiseworthy as they require protracted effort to acquire. The same goes for such manners as please women.

The theme of peace reveals the complex relations of attraction and repulsion that existed between clerics and knights. In the name of God's peace, the priests are expected to oppose war. It is the image they portray, for instance, in those romances that project the present into the past they are narrating. At the beginning of his *Romance of Troy* (1165), the clerk Benoît de Sainte-Maure has noble Trojans debating the expedition Paris might undertake against Greece. Priests, prophets of doom (including Cassandra), and elders like Panthus, 'a very old, wise, and lettered vassal' (l. 4077), are all very critical of the military campaign, which may entail terrible reprisals for their city. One of them is targeted in the diatribe of Troilus, the hawk: 'Fair knights, why is it I see you so upset by the words of a priest who would have us believe lies? [...] It is mere cowardice that wags his tongue. Priests are always cowards and take fright for no reason. Never should this one be listened to, and God may curse his divinations! What business does he have in the midst of knights? Let him go and pray in churches. Between him and us nothing agrees. Let him grow fat and busy himself with comforts: he needs nothing else. As for us, it is a life of

toil and pain we must lead to reach glory' (l. 3993–4010). The rest of the story, as narrated by Benoît the clerk, largely gainsays these anticlerical cavils. In passing, it is noteworthy that, even if women take no part in the debate, they are the passive cause of the war, in the person of Hesione (Priam's sister, taken as his concubine by Telamon of Salamis and whose abduction the Trojans wanted to avenge), and of course of Helen, whom Paris brought home with him in preference to her aunt.

Benoît de Sainte-Maure must have met John of Salisbury at the court of Henry II of England. Both priests were in favour of strong kingship which stifled aristocratic revolts, thus forcefully imposing public peace. Therefore, they advocate an army of gallant and well-trained knights in the service of the common good and under the control of the prince's administration. This is why they paradoxically revile the softening effect that the company of women has on warriors. The *Policraticus* (1159) bemoans the decadence of military discipline, ascribed to the affluence fostered by a prolonged period of peace: 'Our youngsters take pleasure under cover or in shade [a quotation from Juvenal]. As if they were born to consume the fruits of the earth, sleeping in daylight, postponing honourable duties to whore-mongering, and pursuing pleasure the entire day' (VI, 6). Drawing on the Latin classics which praise the good old days of the stern Roman Republic, it continues with a lengthy denunciation of the slack behaviour of knights, 'who attack other people's chastity and prostitute their own' (VI, 16).

The same discourse on warrior immorality appears in a letter written in 1184 by Peter of Blois, another courtier of Henry II of England. Peter complains about the contempt shown by the recipient of the letter's nephews, all knights, towards the clergy. 'Taking on the execrable manners of their comrades-in-arms,' they flaunt their arrogance, disparage the Church and dare call the servants of God and the Lord's anointed idle. Boast their feats of yore as they might, they were quick to forget the oath taken at their dubbing. They only use violence to rob and oppress the poor. They lack the discipline and training advocated by Vegetius and the best Roman strategists. Drunk, greedy, and lazy as they are, as well as hedonistic and lustful, they are only interested in orgies (*ep.* 94). All in all, Peter of Blois' and John of Salisbury's writings highlight the long-standing differences between clerics and warriors. It is debauchery, which erodes military discipline and bravery in battle, for which they rebuke the knights. That lust, base and defiling, cannot possibly be confused, even for these rigorist priests, with courtly love, which uplifts those who abide by its rules, giving them courage in combat.

From the twelfth century onwards, this competition between clerics and knights began to be transposed into amorous literature. In one of his songs which pertains more to lewd fabliau than to *fin'amor*, William IX inveighs against clerks: 'It is no mortal sin for a lady to love a loyal knight, but it is wrong for her to love a cleric or monk: in all justice, she should be sent to the stake' (V, l. 7–12). These verses are but a reflection of the highly satirical literary genre of the dispute between women on the amorous superiority of clerk or knight. This debate began to emerge around 1150 as a genre of Latin poetry composed by highly lettered individuals whom Romance philology has probably wrongly identified as the mythical goliards, errant runaway clerks, or tavern denizens who used to improvise bawdy songs when drunk. The earliest of these debates would seem to be the *Remiremont Council*, preserved in a mid-twelfth-century manuscript at Trier library. The other two—*Phyllis and Flora* and the much shorter *Frigus hinc est horridum*—had been copied around 1230 into the *Codex buranus*, which takes its name from the Bavarian monastery of Beuern where it was discovered in 1803. These three poems offer a distant echo of Ovid, who in the *Amores* presents a similar dispute between Elegy and Tragedy personified (III, 1). In the same book, the Roman poet complained about having been left by his mistress for a soldier: he then proceeded to revile the knights as a group, calling them blood-thirsty and greedy plunderers (III, 8). Lastly, the authors of the *Remiremont Council* and of *Phyllis and Frigus* re-enact the scholastic disputations they are confronted with every day in their studies.

The long (234-verse) poem, each verse made up of two heptasyllabic hemistichs, known as *Remiremont Council*, describes an assembly of nuns at the eponymous monastery in Lorraine in early spring, where they debate the relative merits of the love of knights against the love of clerks, of whom the latter gain their support. Those who prefer the former are to be excommunicated in the name of Venus. The satire is all the more effective as Remiremont had a reputation for the laxness of its rule, including, most probably, in its relations with men. Indeed, a papal bull of Pope Eugene III, dated 17th March 1151, described a recent conflagration at the monastery as 'divine judgment'. Pointing out the canonesses' 'carnal manner of living' (*conversatio carnalis*), it urges them to 'reform themselves and turn the lewdness of their sin into ardour for spiritual affairs'.¹²⁴ At the beginning of the *Remiremont Council*, the nuns start their assembly by

¹²⁴ Bull edited by Oulmont, *Les Débats du clerc*, 56–57, corrected in Faral, *Recherches*, 215, n. 1.

reading Ovid and singing amorous songs. Rather than their nuns' habits, they are clad in rich dresses of many colours decorated with flowers. In their plea in favour of clerks, they call the latter 'affable, pleasing, honourable men, who know not desertion or slander, but who are [...] generous in gifts, and keep their promises [...]. Their love is profitable, firm, and steady' (l. 69–87). The knights' advocates claim, on the contrary, that the knights 'fear neither wounds nor death in order to obtain our favours' (l. 110) in accordance with the courtly idea of surpassing oneself in war for the sake of love. The author may have been from Toul, since the poem claims that the clerks of that city often went to the monastery, and that the Council had been convened to please them (l. 13–14). The parody, even with its preferred register of erotic bawdiness and irreverence towards liturgy and the monastic rule, does nevertheless convey a number of *fin'amor* key values which the clerks were taken to embody: manners, honesty, sincerity, faithfulness, and so on.

Just as in the *Remiremont Council*, springtime sets the stage for *Phyllis and Flora* and *Frigus hinc est horridum*. It relates, of course, to the literary *topos* of the *locus amœnus*, the beautiful garden of amorous adventures, but also to the pagan April and May festivals, which—in temporary transgression of the established order—celebrate Venus, the growth of vegetation, and the return of the fecundity of the soil after winter. The first of these songs is an exchange between two maidens: Phyllis, who is in love with the knight, and Flora, in love with the clerk; in the second song, it is thyme and sorrel that play these roles. In both debates, the intellectuals again win out over the knights. In contrast to Ovid, Flora calls the latter poor, ill-nourished, and tattered, while the former, being well-heeled, do not need to plunder but live peacefully in opulence and are most open-handed (§23–27, 34–35). Phyllis, however, chides them for their tonsures, which deprive them of a beautiful mane of hair, and their dark and dull clothes (§29). By contrast, she admires the knight's bearing when he wears his hauberk on horseback, and his bravery in combat, when he thinks only of her (§30–32). The last remark refers to the practice mentioned by the poem *Frigus*: 'They wear our portraits in jousts, which they have embroidered in silk on their cloaks and painted on their shields' (§6). Flora, staunchly pleading for the clerk, remains unruffled and remarks that the tonsure (*corona*, 'crown') is but a 'token of command' (§38) over the knights. Is she then alluding to the increased role of lettered men in royal government and the regimenting of warriors in an army that is increasingly controlled by the bureaucracy? Her conclusion emphasizes the knowledge that ensures the clerk's superiority: 'His spirit is uplifted,

thus distinguishing between the path towards Heaven and the elements of Nature' (§39); 'he learns of the ancient gestures of Princes, he writes and studies, while thinking of his sweet one' (§40). The ruling of Amor and his judges goes in her favour and against Phyllis and her knight (§78–79). Likewise, it is the clerk who wins out in *Frigus* (§7).

In the early thirteenth century, the Latin debates on the clerk and the knight were adapted in a French poem, *Jugement d'amour*, also known as *Florence and Blancheflor*, at least five somewhat different versions of which are extant. In these compositions, love has become less sensual, and the argument from manners becomes more relevant than earlier: 'More than any other man, clerks ought to have a Lady, for they are more knowledgeable than knights in the matter of courtliness' (l. 144–147). The tonsured are still ridiculed by their adversary, who describes them as busy 'turning over and over' their psalters and parchments, thereby inextricably associating them with written culture, both religious and administrative, of which they are the bearers (l. 116–117). However, by hammering home the message on the benefits of good manners, learned clerics eventually succeeded in making courtesy attractive. In that way, they also transferred manners to the knighthood.

The idea of refinement conquering ladies is also to be found in a *partimen* which, even if it did not pit clerk against warrior, picked up a similar motif. Two troubadours, Gui de Cavaillon (c. 1175–c. 1230), a nobleman from Comtat Venaissin, and sire Raimbaut, debate about two knights who covet the same lady. One is gallant in battle but uneducated; the other is as well-bred, cultured, and wealthy as he is cowardly on the battlefield. Which should she love—the gallant warrior or the courtier? Raimbaut contends that the coward is the better lover: women do not seek the company of men who are 'crude or savage' (*braus ni salvatge*, l. 27), who become 'villein as soon as they dismount' (l. 31), but rather of courtly barons; they are attracted to the most clever, pleasant, and generous, irrespective of their physical strength. Gui is on the warrior's side: he points out that, the heart being the seat of courage, love will be all the greater. Here ancient Greek history provides both sides with arguments: since Gui repeatedly mentions Alexander the Great's bravery, Raimbaut retorts with the example of Paris conquering Helen with his generosity. Love is worth neither theft nor murder, he contends, alluding to the sometimes bloody plunder in which warriors indulge, covetous as they are of the considerable booty they hope to win in order to flaunt their wealth. In the judgement of both troubadours, the dispute should be settled by Aiceline Unaud de Lanta, a noblewoman

from the countryside around Toulouse, pursuant to the rules of improvised, versified discussion in the ladies' chamber.

At the end of our tour of twelfth- and thirteenth-century amorous literature, a naive, if complex, question should now be raised. Is *fin'amor* merely a fictional creation, a form of poetic entertainment, with no consequence whatsoever on aristocratic behaviour? Or, on the contrary, did it refine the latter, thus teaching the nobility respect and faithfulness towards ladies? Since 1968 at least, the school of criticism whose epistemological wealth is often oversimplified under the conveniently reductionist label of 'postmodern' has highlighted 'intertextuality': all the text speaks about is itself, and all literature is, basically, 'self-referential'. Literature functions independently of society at large, as a closed network, wherein works simply refer to one another without any external inspiration. This analytical grid, if applied to troubadours, trouvères, *Minnesänger*, Latin poets, and romance writers, would simply leave their amorous experiences and the ladies they sing about deprived of any reality.¹²⁵ What this critical theory puts forward is poetic creation and the resulting text, whose form and content are taken up and altered by other writers who are initiated into their wealth of expression and their thematic codes. From this point of view, scholars are rightly reminded that courtly love is only accessible to them today through the poems, romances, and treatises that have dealt with it. Hence, their perception can only be extremely distorted, as literature is biased by an undeniable amount of borrowing from the classics, and of literary play, poetic idealization, and artistic subjectivity. Even if historians acknowledge these limitations to reading, nevertheless they cannot possibly fail to ascribe to amorous poetry any reflection of their authors' living experience, including their social experience.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, love is the topic of debates and disputes among courtiers. These real discussions are echoed in the fiction of Latin poems, where women argue about knights and clerks, in the *ten-sos* and *partimens* of troubadours that discuss ladies, in Andreas Capellanus's *Treaty on Love* and its dialogues between men and women from all walks of life, as well as in romances describing the internal monologues of protagonists on how their love affair should develop. To pick up on the very accurate title of a 1989 article by Rüdiger Schnell, courtly love should be regarded 'as courtly discourse on love,' in other words, as the topic of casuistic discussions, 'restricted to a small elite' of courtiers on 'true love', taking into account its carnal or spiritual, low or high,

¹²⁵ A recent critical approach to be found in Baladier, 'L'amour au risque', 167, 176–177.

crude or refined aspects (p. 80). Schnell thus claims this to be the sole social reality of courtly love, which is restricted to 'verbalization (and therefore humanization) of social conflicts' in oratory jousts. These many-voiced discourses on love could then be considered as a kind of safety valve for the tensions between men and women, between rivals and jealous husbands, or even, for each individual, between reason and passion (p. 363). Their polemic staging would then have to be dismissed as mere psychodrama.

The ideal courtly love offers is a very lofty one. That is why, to quote another German scholar, Joachim Bumke, it pertains to 'social utopia: it is the password to a new, better society, albeit an unreal one, which could only exist in poetic imagination'. Yet, the great mediaevalist is forced to acknowledge 'that through its poets, twelfth- and thirteenth-century aristocratic society was engaging in an ideal that rejected the brutality and roughness with which it used to pursue its interests in real life, and called on men and women to submit themselves to the rules of *curialitas* and love' (pp. 376–377). Thus, he half-opens the door to other, undoubtedly less pessimistic interpretations that which link 'indissolubly [...] social and literary fact', as Jean Frappier advocated as early as 1959: for 'the poetized image has taken on the value of a model, imposed rules of conduct, raised to clearer awareness latent or at times confused aspirations' (p. 135). A similar balance is to be found in Claude Roussel's claim: 'As a complex, subtle ideological construct, incorporating a dose of dream and ideal, *fin'amor* is no less real, and was certainly able to motivate or influence the behaviour of men and women of that time' (1994, p. 58).

Like chivalry or manners, courtly love at least to some extent altered behaviour. What it handed on to noblemen was a form of self-control towards the ladies of their milieus, whom they learned thereby to respect much more than they used to. Its codes and values met with all the more adherence as they were conveyed by lyrical songs which provided constant reminders of those codes and values. In addition, they were embodied by literary characters who became prestigious role models for the aristocratic public. Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan urged his disciple to follow in the tracks of the male heroes of love stories popularized by romances: Paris, Tristan, Aeneus, Yvain, Apollonius of Tyre, Linhaure, or King Arthur (l. 195–290).¹²⁶ Exemplariness is always of the essence in mediaeval narratives. The same is often true for poetry, which is seldom restricted to art for the sake of art. More or less consciously or explicitly, what those

¹²⁶ Girbea, 'Aimery Picaud et Arnaut de Marsan'.

authors seek to do is to identify a moral in order to alter the amorous practices of their readers and listeners.

The spread of *fin'amor* through literature civilized aristocratic mores, and gave a more central place to ladies in gender relations. It cannot possibly be reduced to a mere lure to set the vassal in bondage to his lord, nor a mere façade that concealed the sad reality of a reduced feminine condition. Ladies, being allied to clerks, became actors in the triumph of the new model, which granted them increased power of decision in the choice of their lovers, and more respect from the latter, sometimes bordering on subservience. By no means is *fin'amor* an isolated experience in twelfth- and thirteenth-century general social evolution. It was courtly in the strict sense of the term. It was implemented within a human group where knowledge was on the rise and manners were spreading out as the royal bureaucracy expanded and the king tended to monopolize violence. Even if it borrowed a number of motifs and themes from the Hellenic philosophy of friendship or Latin rhetoric, it pushed deep roots into the soil of feudo-vassalic relations that were increasingly controlled by the sole authority of the prince. By taking the knight out of his 'tower' and bringing him to the 'court', the king put him in contact with erudite clerks and learned women, who taught him more polished and measured ways of addressing them and behaving towards them. In a way, *fin'amor*, just like chivalry and civility, stems from the strengthening of princely powers.

Some writers claim that there are degrees to love, from the most carnal up to the most spiritual, from the most imperfect to the most accomplished, pure and true. Such an idea follows the Hellenic hierarchy from *eros* all the way up to *agape*. Its bipolarity had long been taken up by Latin patristic in the opposition of *amor carnalis* and *amor spiritualis* or of *cupiditas* and *caritas*. In 1280, in a comment on a song composed by the troubadour Guiraut de Calanson (d. c. 1212), Guiraut Riquier, a most prolific poet from Narbonne, divided love three ways. His third and last love, the lowest and most selfish one, is 'carnal'. The middle one, what we feel for others, is 'natural'. The highest one, which dominates the other two, is termed 'celestial' or 'sovereign': it is the love of God (LXXXIV). It refers to the knight's religiosity, which, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, went through transformations that were as essential as the perception of the love of men for women. It is therefore crucial to analyse the spirituality of the warrior, for this is part and parcel of the contribution of 'clergie' to mediaeval aristocracy.

RELIGION: THE WARRIOR'S PIETY

In the mid-twelfth century, the regular canon Hugues de Fouillois (d. 1172/1174) wrote the *Aviarium*, in which he listed the symbolic qualities of birds in order to encourage Rainier, a knight who was one of his friends, to join him in taking the cloth. Since he is addressing an 'illiterate', he states that he will deal in a very down-to-earth fashion with the most subtle of truths, at the same time illustrating them with his own drawings, 'so that the simple man's intelligence should be enlightened by the simplicity of painting'. For instance, he represents a dove and a hawk as accompanying the cleric and the knight respectively: the one is engaged in the contemplative life, the other in the active life. The former uses the feathers of his bird to write, the latter, riding his horse, uses his bird for hunting. Dissimilar as they might appear, the two birds still have some common features. 'Now the hawk and the dove come to roost upon the same pole. I belong to the clergy, you to chivalry. We convert in order to settle in regular life as on a pole. You who used to catch domestic birds, through your good deeds you will have to catch wild birds, which means laymen through conversion [...]. After the dove, we shall now deal with the hawk, which represents noblemen. When a nobleman converts, his example is useful to the poor' (p. 118).

Admittedly, the prologue to the *Aviarium* uses the birds metaphor in a way that is much too densely repetitive for our modern sensibilities. Yet it does set up a double dichotomy, one easily understandable, between clergy and chivalry. This dialectic is on the one hand cultural, as evidenced in the use of drawing to make up for the mental limitations of the unlettered, but on the other also spiritual. By asking the knight Rainier to make the move from a secular to a religious way of life, Hugues the cleric intends, through his own example, to improve as much his friend's conduct as that of all the 'poor' who admire this noble warrior and take him as a role model.

Monastic conversion, to which Hugues de Fouillois invites the knight Rainier, was quite common in the twelfth century. It could lead into the cloisters young clerks or knights in the fullness of youth, like Bernard of Clairvaux and his Parisian schoolfellows, or the soldiers in Hugues d'Avranches's troops. Sometimes it occurred later in life, when middle-aged or elderly warriors, who, because they were widowed, sick, or nearing death, decided to retire to a monastery to prepare for their departure. In such cases, what they did was push to its ultimate conclusion the links of brotherhood that unified them with a community which they previously

helped with gifts, hospitality, and friendship, in exchange for intercessory prayers for the dead in their household. It was therefore perhaps not too alien for them to take the cloth. The idea of battle, even if it was against passions and demons, was an ever-recurring motif in the sermons these converted knights would listen to in their cloisters, where they were admitted after a ceremony of commendation—the placing of joined hands between the abbot's own hands, very similar to the vassal's homage. Some would even walk into the monastery wearing their hauberks and helmets, with sword and spear in hand: they would then lay all these down in the abbey church, and don the cloth forthwith.¹²⁷ Even more attractive for knights were the military orders, like the Templars or Hospitallers, who would carry on warring under the Cross. Up to the 1180s, monastic life was thriving.

In the thirteenth century, monachism began to decline among noblemen, as knights became increasingly aware that they did not need to become monks in order to save their souls. On this issue, religious sensibilities were now in the process of evolution. The Gregorian reform had had a belated effect on laymen, who were better taught in an ever-increasing number of parishes. A similar conclusion can be drawn regarding the success of the new orders, such as the Franciscans or Dominicans, who evangelized cities with their preaching or by their example. This groundswell, which largely depended on an intellectual renaissance and the spread of writing, altered the behaviour of knights, as they were urged to intensify their spiritual life.

The lettered knights and theological thought

Like Hugues de Fouilloy, many clerics wrote books meant for the edification of laymen. It was quite rare, however, for knights themselves to produce books that were purely of a religious nature. In Italy, Maione of Bari (d. 1160), grand admiral of the Kingdom of Sicily, left a brief commentary on the paternoster. Far longer was the 2,500-verse *Sermon*, a narrative of sacred history by Pietro da Barsegapé, who was probably a captain from the city of Florence. The theological nature of *The Divine Comedy* (1308–1321) by Pietro's contemporary and fellow citizen Dante, who used to fight in the Guelf troop, if somewhat less obvious in terms of literary genre or in the presentation of the dogma, is nevertheless no less pro-

¹²⁷ Miramon, 'Embrasser l'état monastique à l'âge adulte'.

found.¹²⁸ Lastly, it was during the winter of 1250–1251, in Acre, that Joinville wrote the first draft of his *Credo*, or *Romance in images about our faith*, which he revised much later, in 1287, when he was back in France. The text is a brief note on the twelve articles of the Apostles' Creed, based on a typical exegesis which sets them in parallel with Old Testament prophecies. The text, intended to strengthen the faith of the dying, who might be tempted by despair, was embellished with about thirty illuminations, at the author's commissioning. These pictures were meant as a help for the unlettered, according to the conventional wisdom popular since Gregorius the Great.

Along with these rare examples of doctrinal treatises written by lay noblemen, mention should be made of those tales, admittedly pertaining to a different register (one closer to hagiography), of the conversion and penitent life of a fictitious hero. Such was the case, in the Holy Roman Empire, of Hartmann von Aue's *Gregorius* (c. 1190) and Rudolf von Ems's *Barlaam and Josaphat* (1225–1230). Finally, alongside these German ministerials, Robert de Boron, presumably a knight, should also be mentioned for his works on Joseph of Arimathea, Merlin, and King Arthur; these are mostly religious in tone and largely inspired by the Bible and the apocryphal Gospels. These three authors' romances should not, however, be confused with the previous works whose purpose was a systematic exposition of the dogma.

It is hardly surprising that so few books of theology were written by laymen in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This may be explained by the fact that advanced studies at a cathedral school or university were required before licence was granted to teach doctrine. No man was allowed to teach theology unless he had completed a very long syllabus and been ordained. In his *De nugis curialium* ('Courtiers' Trifles'), Walter Map lambasted the Waldensians, 'ignorant, with no Latin', whom he had met in 1179 at the third Lateran Council. They could hardly read the French translation of the annotated psalter and a few books from the Bible. Nevertheless, Walter goes on to say, they proved all the more obsessed and stupid in theological discussions, as each young scholar, 'used to thorny disputations where opponents are well-nigh impossible to convince', knows how 'the wealth of wisdom contained in each letter of the divine page' is impenetrable. One should therefore not 'throw pearls before swine' (Matth. 7:6) by teaching such boors, when they are unqualified to receive, and even more so to transmit, the divine word. The anec-

¹²⁸ Livi, *Dante e la teologia*.

dote ends on the Waldensians' woeful performance during the Council, where, rather than providing principled arguments in response to the easy questions Walter Map claims he asked them on the *Credo*, answered only with 'We believe', thus demonstrating their blind faith. This had the assembly rolling in the aisles, at least according to Walter, who was seldom sparing in his vitriolic comments (I, 31). All in all, his scorn shows the ban on laymen teaching Christian doctrine on grounds of their superficial schooling.

Joinville—the author of a *Credo* that many a cleric, proud as they were of their long studies, might have unhesitatingly ridiculed—relates an anecdote that vindicates intellectuals in his *Life of Saint Louis*. He claims he had heard the King say that it was incumbent upon the knight who wanted to combat the error of the Jews to use his sword against them 'and thrust it into their guts as far as it would go' (§53), instead of engaging them in sophisticated disputes, useless and harmful for the knights' crude intelligence. Such debates should be left to the learned clerks. This anecdote is revealing of the anti-Judaic backlash of the royal authorities in the thirteenth century. Before then, Christian intellectuals had been much more open-minded and had consistently held exegetic or theological discussions with rabbis. Louis IX's words above all reflect widespread fear of apostasy in laymen, whose lack of culture and gullibility, as has already been argued, made them vulnerable to the fallacies spread by the enemies of their faith.¹²⁹

During the same period, similar misgivings regarding heresy would seem to explain the Church authorities' ban on Romance translations of the Bible, a major reason for the condemnation of the Waldensians. Rather than complete books of the Old and New Testament in the vernacular, the Church favoured condensed versions (the most common of which was Peter Comestor's (d. 1179) *Historia Scholastica*), or illustrated and commented lives of Christ, all of which appeared free of risk for the readers' orthodoxy.¹³⁰ Indeed, because of their studies and their orders, priests regarded themselves as guardians of the real faith and the moral standards in which they educated the people. Nothing, however, prevented learned noblemen who could read Latin from directly exploring the Vulgate, the traditional, official Bible text. Abelard for one advises his son Astrolabe 'to read the Holy Scriptures frequently, and to read everything in the light of it' (I. 39–40).

¹²⁹ Dahan, *Les Intellectuels chrétiens et les Juifs*, 350.

¹³⁰ Lobrichon, *La Bible au Moyen Âge*, 35, 187, 213.

It was the clerics' duty to lead knights onto the right path, especially if the latter were unlettered. The idea, developed by John of Salisbury in the *Politicraticus*, that every king should have at his side a sacerdotal councilor, like the prophet Nathan for David, might, with only minor adjustments, be applied to them. He asserts: 'Let the mind of the prince read through the medium of the priest's tongue!' (IV, 6). According to John, the priest has to guide an unlettered person who, because he is unable to access the Scriptures directly, has to fall back on the cleric's discourse. This sacerdotal mediation is always necessary for receiving the sacraments, especially the Eucharist and confession. Even if the knight is literate, this makes him inevitably dependent on the clergy. His piety is therefore by no means specifically secular in nature, which is evidenced in his recitation of the hourbook, a crude imitation of the monastic services.¹³¹ Yet in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, new devotional forms began to spread amongst the knights, along with a different perception of the phenomenon of religion. Consequently, evidence can be found of a few mutations in 'spirituality' during that period, even though this term is anachronistic, as it was unknown in its modern sense to people in the Middle Ages.

Courtliness and piety

According to the *Fioretti* (1370–1390), Francis of Assisi (1181–1226) is alleged to have said to a knight who had offered him exquisite hospitality in his house: 'Dear brother, know that courtliness is one of God's properties, and he courteously "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good (Matth. 5, 45)".' Charity, one of the theological virtues, and the most important of all in the Christian faith, thus becomes the sister of courtliness, which means its next of kin and, birth right notwithstanding, its quasi peer. However, the prime object of charity is God, as the Dominican Guillaume de Tournai (d. 1293) notes in his *Education of Children*: 'God-fathers should advise their godsons to keep charity, which means that they love God and attend church: "But seek first the kingdom of God (Matth. 6, 33)"' (§12). The advice is first and foremost aimed at those laypersons who hold a child at the baptismal fonts and who may supervise the child's religious education. Emphasis is laid on the primacy of God's love over all other forms. Each Christian has a duty to pray to Him in places of worship where priests lead the service.

¹³¹ Vauchez, *Les Laïcs au Moyen Âge*, 130.

According to Dante's *La Vita Nuova* ('The New Life'), 'God is the Lord of courtliness' (42, 3), and therefore those who serve Him ought to treat Him respectfully. The same idea was expressed a little before 1200 in Arnaut de Mareuil's *Ensenhamen*: 'He who wishes to lead a courtly, pleasant life, with a strong and steady heart, in order for his fame to be maintained, let him learn how to love God, respect, honour, and adore Him. I do not think that prowess or courtliness may exist without God' (l. 55–62). Around 1150, the *Chanson de Girart de Roussillon* mentions devotion to the Trinity as one of the innumerable warrior or courtly virtues of the knight Foulque, the nephew of the hero of the title: 'He is gallant, courtly, educated, noble, well-born, and eloquent. He has as much experience of hunting in woods as in rivers. He can play chess, tric-trac, and dice [...]. He loves God and the Holy Trinity' (l. 4986–4994). In the late twelfth century, the *Roman des Ailes* ('Romance of Wings') puts the honouring of the Church at the top of the list of courtly qualities, above modesty, the love of minstrels, and the sense of friendship, among others. In short, the courtly man, who has received an accomplished education, is characterized by his religiousness.

When Peter Abelard, in his *Carmen ad Astrolabum* ('Advice to Astro-labe'), emphasizes moderation in religion, he is using an argument that is in more ways than one reminiscent of an essential precept of courtliness. What he is asking of his son is that the latter should not yield on impulse to a superficial kind of piety which, 'like the gushing torrent, the more vehement it is, the sooner it will dry up' (l. 664–665). He should imitate Daedalus 'who walked back home along a very modest path', rather than Icarus, who tried to fly too high, for 'he who goes beyond moderation in fasting will also go beyond moderation in greed, and he who tortures himself with long sleepless periods will end up sleeping a lot' (l. 669–670). Moderation, one of the favourite concepts of Aristotle and the Stoics, is not only indispensable to mundane manners and *fin'amor*. It is also closely linked to ethics. *In medio stat virtus*, as scholastic philosophers used to say.

Restraint, commonly recommended in spiritual direction, pervaded the religiousness of the time. Such was the case for Gilbert Foliot (d. 1187), bishop of London, a former abbot of Gloucester and former monk who had been familiar since his early life with the moderation advocated by the Benedictine rule. In 1148–1163, when he was still bishop of Hereford, he wrote a letter to Amicie de Gaël, the wife of Robert (d. 1168), earl of Leicester and chief justice of England, who was famous for his erudition. He had heard rumours that the earl's wife had fallen seriously ill, and

wrote that she had been spared by death so that she could continue to set a good example for her circle. In order to speed her recovery, the bishop asked her to refrain from fasting and to keep on eating meat, ignoring Lent. In compensation, she was expected to feed and clothe thirteen poor people (*ep.* 120). In other words, the pious lady—who was to take the veil at Nuneaton Abbey (Warwickshire) after her husband died—saw her abstinence commuted into alms. Admittedly, there is nothing new or even original in the dispensation from fasting for the ill, especially from a bishop with a reputation for moderation which according to his detractors bordered on spinelessness, and who in later years would come into conflict with the fiery Thomas Becket when the latter was in revolt against the king. His letter to Amicie nevertheless reveals the impact of a more balanced religious sensibility that still prevailed within the lay aristocracy.

According to Joinville, the meaning that Saint Louis gave to the word *prud'homme* covered a semantic field where courtliness met spirituality. It was as such that the king wanted himself to be known more than anything else. 'Pronouncing the word', Joinville wrote, 'would fill his mouth' (§32), possibly on account of the rounding of the lips involved, but also of the pleasure of voicing such a beautiful concept. Despite being opposed in Joinville's time to the Beguine's hypocritical devotion, the notion is still endowed with a certain religious dimension. Joinville further explained that Philip Augustus, Saint Louis' grandfather, was said to distinguish between *preux homme* (lit. 'courageous man') and *prud'homme*, the former being indeed an accomplished knight but one who may well live in sin or even be an infidel, whereas the latter is a Christian knight who, having been touched by the grace of God, behaves wisely in His presence (§559–560).

In Joinville's lexicon, 'wisdom' is related to *prud'homie*. According to him, the former term cannot possibly be applied to Hugues III (1162–1192), duke of Burgundy, 'a most accomplished knight, but who was never deemed wise before God nor men'. 'Wisdom' is applied to Old Testament sapiential literature and recurs frequently in late thirteenth-century authors, from the encyclopaedist Brunetto Latini to the jurist Philippe de Beaumanoir, who make it a synonym of loyalty, urbanity, patience, courage, and generosity, but also of piety. In the classification of the four cardinal virtues popularized in the twelfth century by Platonist moralists and the Latin translation of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, wisdom is equated with prudence. It helps avoid such obstacles as stand between man and God, but also confers on the king and his councillors

mundane wisdom, a sense of foresight, and even a form of shrewdness.¹³² The concept is a multifaceted one, from the most secular to the most religious. It refers to virtue, which the believer's will achieves by dint of repeating good deeds, but mostly with the help of grace. In those days, piety was steeped in urbanity, requiring moderate, elegant gestures in the service of the 'Lord of Courtliness'.

Mass attendance and the dangers of Pharisaism

In 1215, the fourth Council of Latran made it an obligation on all Christians to receive communion at Easter and confess at least once a year. Like Sunday mass, such practices were by no means new, and it seems they were even—under various forms—essential for ancient Christianity. Yet they were now more than ever available to all and sundry in the West, because of the increased education of priests, the increased number of ordinations, and the extension of parish networks. By that time the noblemen's fortified houses had their own chapels, where the lord, his wife and children, or the garrison knights, could go to hear mass, say their hours, or simply meditate in solitude. These oratories might be served occasionally by the village priest or permanently by a resident priest, sent to the castle with the permission of the bishop.

Géraud, chaplain to Hugues d'Avranches, was very concerned for the spiritual life of the warriors in his master's retinue; but such was not the case for Roger le Poer (d. 1139). According to William of Newburgh, Roger, soon-to-be bishop of Salisbury and lord chancellor of England, owed his irresistible rise to the popularity he enjoyed with Henry II and his knights because of the lightning speed with which he read the service in the parish church outside Caen of which he was priest (I, 18). The chronicler is obviously not too fond of Roger, a priest who was guilty of Simony and Nicolaism, whose son was also to become lord chancellor and whose nephews were to hold a number of high clerical offices. His remarks on Roger's superficial piety and on how bored the warriors would get at church are no less revealing, however: indeed, attending mass was a well-rooted habit among knights.

Charters bear witness to a growing demand for the Eucharistic sacrifice within the nobility. Around 1200, for example, Simon Le Bret donated twelve acres of land to the canons of Waltham (Essex) for them to

¹³² Murray, *Reason and Society in the Middle Ages*, 122–123, 133–136.

produce 'such bread and wine as is necessary to provide our Lord's body and blood on the altars of their churches'; the donor further specifies that he is acting 'in honour of such a lofty sacrament'.¹³³ Alongside donations like these, which make mention of money given for Eucharist and which were so frequent in twelfth- and thirteenth-century England, there is also mention of alms which were specifically allocated for the production of liturgical books or the maintenance or repair of church lights. Such details are evidence of the donors' involvement in local chapels, parish churches, and monasteries, the concrete needs of which they appeared to be well acquainted with. The new interest in the service of the mass may explain, *a contrario*, Gerald of Wales's complaint, in his *Gemma ecclesiastica* ('Jewel of the Church', c. 1197), against those priests who would celebrate more than the two daily services laid down in the canons, in order to make more money (I, 49).

There were also clerics who would ride along with their lords in their military expeditions. These early army chaplains would play a key role in the rites that preceded a pitched battle. They celebrated mass, helped the warriors pray on their knees before the cross, chanted psalms, and blessed the banners and relics that were carried by the troops. As early at least as the eleventh century, they would hear confessions and give Holy Communion to most of the warriors, who were thus reassured when facing the risk of death, which could thereafter be bodily but not spiritual. According to several *chansons de geste*, when no priest was available, knights would eat three blades of grass in memory of the Trinity and Eucharist they were deprived of. By the same token, they would, for want of a priest, confess to one another. In his *Life of Saint Louis*, Joinville relates how he heard the sins of Guid'Belin, constable of Cyprus, who was taken prisoner with himself at al-Mansura, and subsequently absolved him—'by such power as God bestows on me' (§355)—forthwith forgetting what he had just heard. Such extreme cases, which were accepted by clerics, made it possible to sidestep the rule that only priests might administer sacraments. However, they certainly cannot be interpreted as a claim by the knights to any sacerdotal power.¹³⁵

The same Joinville opens his *Credo* with an act of faith in the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, which he claims is disputed by the Languedoc heretics (§3). In the *Life of Saint Louis*, he mentions the two priests who used to read the service of the hours to him when he was in the Holy

¹³³ *The Early Charters of the Augustinian Canons of Waltham Abbey*, 306, n° 447 (1187–VII 1209).

¹³⁵ Storelli, *Le Chevalier et la mort*, 436–441.

Land. One would celebrate mass for Joinville himself at dawn, the other for his knights who were accustomed to getting up later (§501). Attendance at mass would thus seem not to be restricted to Sundays: it might even have become an everyday practice for many a nobleman. Such frequency of mass-taking is only rarely mentioned in the poems of the *chanson de geste*,¹³⁶ the twelfth- and thirteenth-century genre *par excellence*, but is a staple feature in Arthurian romances from the late twelfth century on. Knights stop by hermitages to attend mass, and indeed the quest for the Holy Grail has potent Eucharistic connotations. The vessel, when it first appears in the writings of Chrétien de Troyes, carries the single host that feeds the father of the Fisher King every night. Robert de Boron portrayed it as the platter in which Christ instituted the Eucharist during the Last Supper and in which subsequently the blood of the crucifixion poured, a sacrifice that was re-enacted by the mass. In thirteenth-century prose romances, its appearances are often accompanied by Eucharistic miracles: a wafer carried down from Heaven by angels, the appearance on the paten of the Child Jesus or of Christ on the Cross, a sainted bishop come back from Paradise to celebrate mass with angels on either side of him, and so on.¹³⁷

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, mass-going seems to have become so common within the nobility that Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan's *Ensenhamen*, whose—admittedly quite frivolous—purpose was to conquer more women, relates how its two protagonist knights were woken up very early at the priest's behest to attend mass (l. 149–50). At the end of the thirteenth century, another romance, the Occitan tale of love known as *Flamenca*, relates the young hero's stratagem to gain approach to the ill-wed lady whose jealous husband has locked her up in a tower. He poses as the cleric who during mass brings to her the psalter that she kisses at the moment of peace, each time exchanging with her a couple of syllables, until in the end he manages to communicate the time and place of a rendezvous (l. 3934–60). Finally, the *History of Selby Abbey* attributes several miracles concerning the freeing of prisoners to Saint Germain of Auxerre, the saint protector of the Yorkshire monastery. One of these tells of a band of knight-thieves who launch raids on the abbey's estate from their neighbouring stronghold, in which they lock up peasants for ransom. Following Saint Germain's intercession, one of the victims manages to escape the stronghold, because the warriors and their servants have all gone to the village to

¹³⁶ Combarieu du Grès, *L'Idéal humain et l'expérience morale*, 469.

¹³⁷ Aurell, *La Légende du roi Arthur*, 454–458.

attend mass (pp. 40–41). In all these examples, the altar sacrifice appears as a social convention which noblemen routinely abide by. Very seldom is it associated with the participants' communion, as they would have needed to confess beforehand and submit themselves to strict fasting. Other more normative texts confirm how common mass attendance was within the aristocracy. Around 1200, the *Ordre de chevalerie* recommends daily attendance, following the prescriptions Hugues de Tibériade is alleged to have given Saladin before his dubbing (l. 293). In the *Four Ages of Man* (c. 1264), the jurist Philip of Novara claims that every man's first duty, as soon as he has risen in the morning, is 'to go to church to attend mass and diligently hear the service in honour of Our Lord and say the orations and prayers for Him in a spirit of penitence' (§156).

Correct attitude in places of worship is dealt with in several manuals on good manners, which make the church one of the key places of courtliness in action. Amanieu de Sescas's *Teaching to Maidens* enjoins: 'When you are praying or attending mass in church, I bid you to mind your eyes and not to look around foolishly, but to keep them down or to direct them at the altar' (l. 201–204). Robert de Blois is even more specific, emphasizing the elegance and measure that should rule gestures of feminine piety. He forbids chatter or laughter in church, where people must 'kneel in courtly fashion, indulge in fair devotion, and say their prayers with all their hearts' (l. 404–406). At mass, he goes on to say, maidens should know how to stand up at the reading of the Gospel, cross themselves gracefully, walk to the altar in a dignified way when offering up, stand up with joined hands for the Elevation and Consecration, bow their heads, and then kneel down. If they are ill or pregnant, however, women may remain seated and read their psalters through the ceremony (l. 415–434).

For all its minute details, Robert de Blois's description never mentions the use of any prayer book in which the faithful followed the service. Yet prayers at the mass were in Latin and changed every day with the liturgical calendar. So did the much longer Bible readings or pericopes, at least in the earlier half of this calendar. For laypersons, the contents of the mass were all the more impenetrable as it was mostly murmured, making it difficult for them to follow with any attention. Reverence might thus become perfunctory, and attention shift from altar to the congregation. The necessity, highlighted by Robert de Blois, for the faithful to behave in a dignified way is simply explained by the need to win the esteem of all those who gaze at them: 'Take great care to keep a wise countenance at the *moutier* (an old French word for 'church'), for you are observed by a great many, who will note your good and bad deeds' (l. 396–399). The

remark is revealing of a society that is highly aware of honour and shame, one that holds the quality of someone's behaviour—including in the religious field—to depend largely on the judgement of their close circle. It also reflects a certain indifference to internal spirituality, like in most liturgical recommendations in manuals on good manners.

Even though didactic treatises mostly emphasize external behaviour, they still describe those gestures that should, in theory at least, result in the reverence that is indispensable in worship, rather than in the admiration of the assembly. Their literary genre goes a long way towards explaining why they insist so much on the need to maintain appearances and project a seemly image. This Pharisaism, however, is no longer viewed as acceptable in books with a strong ethical or religious focus. John of Salisbury devotes a whole chapter of his *Policraticus* to bitter criticism of those Christians who, behind a deceitful façade of piety and moral rectitude, are only eager to please: 'They display the pallor of their faces, they utter deep groans, they are unexpectedly flooded with false and easy tears, their heads are lowered, their eyes half closed, their hair short, their heads nearly shaved, their voices lowered, their lips moving in prayer, their movements serene [...] and they like wearing dirty clothes and a contrived tawdriness' (VII, 21). A century later, the Dominican Laurent's *Somme le roi* (1279) developed the same argument: 'Clothes do not make the man, neither arms the knight, but generosity and the worth of one's deeds' (56, §90).

In his 1109 letter of spiritual direction to Ermengarde of Anjou (d. 1147), countess of Brittany, Robert d'Arbrissel condemns all forms of pretence of virtue, which he holds to be the worst of sins. This hypocrisy is set in sharp contrast with Christ's commandment to pray in the secret of one's chambers, not to be of sad countenance on fast days and not to do one's alms before men. In the midst of other people, all that matters is the presence 'of God in the heart—in town, at Court, in an ivory bed, under a wealthy dress, in the army, in a tribunal or a banquet: if you love, God shall be with you' (p. 228). He goes on to say: 'God does not accept lip service, but heart service' (p. 232). There are a great many similar texts vilifying religious hypocrisy, which simply build on an idea that is ever-present in the Gospels and which constantly criticize Pharisaism. They may, however, be taken as evidence of a fresh religious sensibility, which from the twelfth century on, rather than advocating body-soul and tongue-heart concord, focused almost entirely on each individual's inner life.¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Constable, 'The Concern for Sincerity', in *Culture and Spirituality in Mediaeval Europe*, XII.

Meditating at church, invoking the Holy Virgin, and other forms of devotion

Knights would often pray, alone, in various places of worship. In Chrétien de Troyes' *The Story of the Grail*, young Percival's mother gives him advice which she considers essential for his education: 'Above all, I beg you, go to monasteries and church and pray to our Lord that you may live this worldly life well, and be honoured until you reach the very end of your life' (l. 563–572). Gornemant de Goort, the knight who trains him for dubbing, goes on to say: 'Remember to go to church and pray our Maker that he may bless your soul with his mercy and protect you as a good Christian here in this worldly existence' (l. 1664–1670). When they entered a church, noblemen would walk up to an altar or a statue of the Holy Virgin and recite prayers learned by rote during childhood. Guilhem de Nemours, a protagonist in *Flamenca*, kneels before the altar of the martyr pope Saint Clement, whom he invokes along with the Holy Virgin, the Archangel Michael (a warrior like himself), and all the saints. He says two or three 'Our Father's' and a brief prayer on the seventy-two names of God in Hebrew, Latin, or Greek. Lastly, he opens a psalter, most probably found on the spot, to read one of his Latin canticles (l. 2270–2294). The reading of psalms or hour-books—an indicator of increased literacy—was frequent in aristocrats' chapels. *Flamenca* does not mention the tabernacle, often dove-shaped, containing a few wafers in a ciborium, very much in line with what period documents describe. As late as the end of the thirteenth century, laypersons seemed to pray near the altar keeping saints' relics, which were still objects of intense worship among territorial princes and noblemen.¹³⁹ Thereafter, however, devotion began to shift towards the Eucharistic, as evidenced by Pope Innocent IV's institution of the Feast of Corpus Christi, for which the form of the service was drawn up by Thomas Aquinas and other Aristotelian theologians, who were particularly sensitive to the issue of transubstantiation and the Real Presence.¹⁴⁰

Other sources suggest forms of oration which were more contemplative or spontaneous than rote prayers or psalters. In his *Life of Saint Anselm*, Eadmer of Canterbury (d. 1124) relates how a knight, Cadulus, stays up all night in a church. He is besieged by the devil who shouts to him, in his squire's voice, that his horses and other possessions have just

¹³⁹ Bozóky, *La Politique des reliques*, 224–254.

¹⁴⁰ Palazzo, *Liturgie et société*, 28–29.

been stolen. So deep is the knight's devotion, however, that he remains motionless and continues praying. Then the devil changes into a bear, who crashes down through the chapel ceiling and rears up in front of him. He remains unruffled, and then starts laughing at the brute. Finally, he hears the devil's voice trying to coax him out of turning to Saint Anselm (1033–1109), the prior of the abbey of Bec, for advice, but he turns it away by crossing himself. As his spiritual counsellor Anselm would later encourage him to become a monk at Marmoutier (I, 25). Meditating in his personal chapel was still common practice for Gautier de Brienne, count of Jaffa, who every night, according to Joinville, 'after bidding his knights goodnight, locks himself up in it to pray for long hours before going to bed with his wife' (§527).

In the twelfth century, devotion to the Holy Virgin would seem to have been more prominent in Western Christianity than in earlier times. In particular, it is a central theme in the sermons of Bernard of Clairvaux, the most respected preacher of his time. A few decades after his death, Dominic of Osma and Francis of Assisi founded mendicant orders which contributed to the spread of piety among laymen. This new, more emotional form of spirituality coincided with the increased role of women in Church life and in models of sanctity.¹⁴¹ In aristocratic circles, it may have something to do with the spread of manners and *fin'amor*, which endowed the lady with a key role at court, together with increased consideration paid to her by the knights. Those same troubadours who flaunt their submission to a lady whose beauty and moral perfection they glorify would unhesitatingly compose hymns in honour of the Holy Virgin, the Lady *par excellence*, using the same metaphors and images through which they extolled human love.¹⁴²

Even if the warriors' specific devotion to Mary grew synchronously with the accelerating civilizing process of noble mores during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, its beginnings go back much earlier. For centuries, they had invoked her aid on the battlefield and painted portraits of her on their banners and shields. They turned to her all the more because their activity often jeopardized their physical safety, as their profession constantly put them at risk of being wounded, maimed, or slain. Worse still, the exactions that they constantly committed and the massacres and plundering they engaged in might have brought them eternal damnation, especially because sudden and violent death, a common hazard in their

¹⁴¹ Dalarun, '*Dieu changea de sexe*.'

¹⁴² Thiolier-Méjean, *L'Archet et le lutrin*, 318–353.

trade, would sometimes prevent their reconciliation with the Church. Around 1188, Peter of Blois has King Henry II admitting this in his *Dialogue with the abbot of Bonneval*: 'The knights' lives are spent entirely in sin!' (l. 423). If they desired salvation, the only recourse they could fall back on was the sole mediator they considered able to intercede effectively for them with her Son. In mediaeval legendaries, Mary is indeed the key advocate who can save from hell those who have a great deal to be forgiven. For such egregious sinners what is important is to have been able to give her at least some token of devotion throughout their lives.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, there are any number of pious anecdotes emphasizing the special relationship between knights and the Holy Virgin. The *Cantigas de Santa María*, written in Galician and commissioned by King Alfonso X of Castile and Léon, were adaptations, in verse and music, of cautionary tales on the assistance the Holy Virgin brought to Christians, including numerous warriors. One of the latter is taken prisoner by the enemy, and his lord fails to pay his ransom. His fetters, however, are broken by Our Blessed Lady, whom he has invoked. He manages to deposit them in the Marian Sanctuary of Rocamadour, in spite of his pursuers (§158). Another knight finds himself cornered by his adversaries who mean to kill him. Having taken refuge in a chapel dedicated to the Holy Virgin, he begs her forgiveness for his sins, whereupon several warriors slain by the Moors rise from their graves in the chapel to fight alongside him. His foes are so impressed by the power of the ghosts and so fearful of God's wrath that they make peace with their victim (§233). Finally, an arrogant and depraved knight, who never goes to mass or says the hours, merely saying a couple of *Ave Maria*'s per day, feels unable to change his life until the Good Lady appears to him one day, holding a glorious silver vessel full of some yellowish, viscous, and foul-smelling liquid. She explains to him that this object is made in his likeness, beautiful-bodied, but with a nauseating soul which is bound for Hell. The knight then does penance and we learn that he will be saved on the day he dies (§152).

These *exempla* collections emphasized the role of the Holy Virgin's intercession in helping knights reach Heaven. The Dominican Thomas de Cantimpré (1200–1272) writes about a warrior, a murderer and torturer, who is ambushed and then beheaded by his foes. Yet his severed head continues to utter frightful cries, calling to Our Blessed Lady. His terrified foes send for the village priest, who orders that his head be put back on his body. Then he hears the confession of the beheaded wretch, who is able to die peacefully thereafter once absolution is pronounced (II, 18). In his

Miracles de Notre Dame, Gautier de Coincy (d. 1236), a Benedictine monk from Saint-Médard de Soissons, rails against knights who spend all their time stealing Church possessions. He nonetheless tells the story of one such pillager, who, even though he is impious, always unhesitatingly bows down before statues of the Holy Virgin. One day he decides to invest some of the stolen possessions in the foundation of a monastery devoted to Our Blessed Lady, to where he means to retire. Unfortunately, he dies suddenly, before he is able to confess all his sins. Both demons and angels claim him as theirs; but Mary has the final word and eventually wrenches him free from Hell (col. 491-499). Her mediation with Christ is therefore crucial at the moment when the soul is separated from the body and has to be judged and sent to its eternal abode.

Other conversions take place—as in the case of the Castilian knight symbolized in the silver vessel and viscous liquid—while the convert is still alive. A compilation of Marian miracles collected in England around 1200 contains the story of a young man who buys a daughter from her parents while on his way to a tournament. On learning that her name is Mary, he decides against raping her. Although he is killed in the joust, he is not damned, as the maiden learns from an apparition of Our Lady. A similar English collection from the fourteenth century contains the story of a priest who, while holding the holy wafer, threatens the Holy Virgin that he will not let go of her Son until she has avenged him on the local lord who has often plundered his parish in the past. He immediately has a vision of the castellan hanging down from five golden ribbons over the yawning gulf of Hell. An angel is about to sever the ribbons with his sword, to the priest's delight. But the Holy Virgin then explains to him that the five ribbons are the five *Ave Maria*'s that the poor man recites every day. The priest, whose feelings towards the castellan have now altered, later tells him the story, which causes the nobleman to radically change his conduct.¹⁴³

The *exemplum* of the five golden ribbons shows how Mary can soften the priest's hardened heart in favour of a sinner, perhaps in comparison with her relation with her Son the Judge. In similar vein, the *Cantigas* tell how a knight, wholly devoted to the Holy Virgin, loses his son when the latter is murdered. In spite of his grief, he manages to catch the murderer and drag him back to the scene of the crime, where he tries to kill him in turn, only to find a mysterious force prevents him from lifting his hand

¹⁴³ British Library, ms Additional 15723, fol. 78, and 15833, fol. 125, quoted in Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors*, 161.

against the prisoner. So he takes him to a church, and, in the sight of a statue of Mary, releases him on the spot. The statue then leans down to him to utter the word 'thanks' (§207). Because he holds his thirst for vengeance in check, the knight is an imitation of Mary's mercy towards the sinners who are responsible for her Son's crucifixion. Her protection, which is highly maternal in nature, and more popular than ever, bears witness to an undeniable humanization of Christianity.

The mystery of the Incarnation would become central in Gothic art, whereas Romanesque sculpture and statuary emphasized the divinity of Christ, who was represented in his full glory and majesty, isolated from men in a mandorla, and the Supreme Judge of mankind in Parousia. Twelfth- and thirteenth-century iconography tends to favour the figure of the Crucified over the Pantocrator, a figure that suffers in his flesh more than any other mortal. It was at that period that the sculpted crucifix began to replace the bare cross of earlier centuries, and, whether made of ivory or cruder material, became common in aristocratic chambers. The Holy Virgin and Saint John the Evangelist, both direct witnesses of Christ's agony, often appear at his side in frescoes and miniatures. Their common devotion is noticeable, for instance, in the dual dedication of Fontevraud monastery, where both monks and nuns lived. Lastly, the Five Holy Wounds in Jesus's hands, feet, and side—which counter the entry of vices through the five senses, according to Pierre Damien (d. 1072)—are increasingly venerated.¹⁴⁴ The mounting popularity of the pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which the Latin states in the East at that period encouraged to a greater extent than earlier on, would certainly have contributed to the growing awareness of Christ's humanity.

Love for fellow men, alms, and voluntary poverty

In Christianity, love of God is manifested through love for one's fellow men. The charity which twelfth- and thirteenth-century moralists demand of noblemen, as members of a dominant and wealthy class, is first and foremost equated with donations to the poor. Guillaume de Tournai (d. 1293) comments at great length on Christ's recommendation to invite the poor when giving a feast (Luke 14:12), which Saint Louis put into practice, literally, during his lifetime. For the Dominican, the food consumed at such feasts is primarily corporeal, because it reinforces the body.

¹⁴⁴ Gougaud, *Dévotions et pratiques*, 74–81.

The charitableness of the meal, however, makes it spiritual on account of the assistance anyone may give to commensals according to Christ's commandment. Eventually, the banquet becomes celestial, its lavish distribution being an example which facilitates the salvation of one's fellow men. It entails voluntary, self-accepted poverty, as intentional alms reduce the donor's patrimony (§29).

Guillaume de Tournai had much in common with the Franciscan Guibert de Tournai (d. 1284). Both men belonged to the same generation and the same Flemish town, and both graduated in theology from the University of Paris, where they taught as masters. Guibert's *Teaching to Kings and Princes* deals with charity and material possessions in quite innovative terms: 'Let the King remember that his riches belong to the people, and that he merely owns them on their behalf. He should not be content with private love, but rather with love for all his subjects, for in this way his heart's affection will have been distended' (p. 19). He goes on to rail against the venality of the king's councillors and courtiers, who steal from the poor in contempt of justice (p. 25). The wide-reaching survey ordered by Louis IX in 1254 to suppress his officers' corruption drew largely upon these ideas, which were then widespread among mendicant orders and intellectual circles in Paris.¹⁴⁵

The link between charity to others and courtliness is made clear in an episode from the *Life* of Ælred de Rievaulx (d. 1167) written by Walter Daniel, a Cistercian who served during the saint's abbotship. The episode in question refers to the period when Ælred became, according to the hagiographer, the most influential councillor of David I (1124–1153), king of Scotland. Gautier claims that 'Ælred, ever faithful, was affable and pleasant with good men out of love, but proud and stern with the wicked, even as he showed affection for them, thus implementing the commandment "love your enemies" (Matth. 5, 44), and putting into practice "I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some" (I Cor 9, 22) [...]. God had taught him patience and endowed him with a shrewd, most prudent soul, so that in his wide, pure heart there should be neither hatred nor resentment, that neither discord nor bitterness might bloom, and that, when he could have harmed many, he might only endeavour to do them good.' Even as he was carving up the meat and serving at the king's table (these honorific functions proceeding from his role as the king's attendant), his thoughts would waft up towards God (§2). After emphasizing his affableness and benevolence, both highly courtly

¹⁴⁵ Le Goff, *Saint Louis*, 216–220, 628–630.

qualities, and the simplicity of his attire, the hagiographer describes how a cruel and wicked knight, who grew jealous of him, began insulting and disparaging him at court. One day, when the half-drunk knight had most coarsely abused him in front of the king and his kin, Ælred answered most benevolently, with a humility and patience equal to the thoughtful consideration of a monk. His abuser, discomfited by such kindness, later begged his forgiveness in private and promised never to repeat such insults. Ælred, compared by his hagiographer to Daniel, Lot, or Solomon, who were all able to preserve their integrity amidst widespread corruption in the royal palace, would soon leave court and take the Cistercian cloth when a prestigious bishopric was set aside for him (§3).

It would be inaccurate to analyse Ælred's composure in the face of insult as mere self-control and moderation peculiar to those courtiers bent on surviving intrigue and plotting beneath a mask of indifference and thus preserving their power. Likewise, the Christian charity to enemies that he shows belongs not only to the hagiographical *topos* of the man above the fray, indisputably marked as destined to the cloister. Thanks to the new preaching, the evangelic message must have spread even more widely than before among chivalry and curial circles.

Like charity to others, liberality in gifts, which was a key value of courtliness, is a Christian value. It was traditionally exercised in favour of the monasteries, which said prayers on behalf of the community and succoured the needy. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, it was mostly exercised in favour of the Cistercians, who advocated the strict implementation of the Benedictine rule, in favour of the regular canons who, unlike monks, took on pastoral duties, in favour of the soldier-monks, embodying the crusader spirit, and in favour of the mendicant orders whose poverty and evangelism fascinated others. Even more strikingly, the number of women's convents began to multiply in unprecedented fashion between 1080 and 1170: during that period, their number soared from one to four hundred in France and England. They were founded especially by hermits, journeying preachers, and reform-minded bishops, but most of all by women, especially widows who wished to attain a higher spirituality. Materially speaking, the transformation was mostly fuelled by the lower nobility's generosity.¹⁴⁶ Lastly, in a period when parochial networks were spreading, local lords funded churches in large numbers, thus backing the efforts of village communities, who subsequently organized churchwardens' councils to manage them.

¹⁴⁶ Venarde, *Women's Monasticism and Mediaeval Society*, 890–1215.

The hagiography and historiography of the period often held up examples of knights and their wives who had a reputation for piety and for giving alms to clerics. In his *Life of Saint Bernard*, Arnaud de Bonneval (d. 1156) extols the generosity in this regard of Theobald IV (1102–1151), count of Blois and of Champagne. He describes the count subsidizing the building of Clairvaux-type monasteries and sending them vast sums of money, which led him to be compared with Solomon, the builder of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Besides this, he also has Theobald caring for the poor, providing them with food and clothes. ‘Bernard also encourages the count to visit hospitals, without recoiling at the appearance of the sick’ (§52). The anecdote bears witness to the role played by the twelfth-century aristocracy in the rise of monasticism, which was mostly led by the Cistercians. It also shows that noblemen at the time were not content merely to bestow alms, but would personally take care of the needy. Such was the case for Beatrice de Say (d. 1197), sister of the earl of Essex, lady-protector of Waltham monastery, whose generosity is praised in Waltham’s *Book of Foundation* (1203). Indeed, she donated a church and several plots of land to the monastery, along with liturgical objects and books. She would often go to Waltham, attending services and bringing food and wine to the monks. She would also visit the sick and clothe and feed the poor (IV, 9). According to Walter Map, one of her contemporaries went one step further in his devotion and commitment to invalids: ‘A nobleman, who was used to being served, went to the hospital to serve; as he was washing the feet of a patient with dreadful sores, he felt nauseous; then he drank the water with which he was washing them, so that his stomach might get used to what was upsetting it’ (I, 23). This was the period of the founding of hospitals and care for the needy. However repulsive, the sick man had become the very image of the suffering Christ.

Evangelism spread within the nobility in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The movement was based on a quasi-literal reading of the New Testament, to which increasingly literate laymen were now gaining access. The poverty experienced by Christ, in particular, became a key element in the new awareness. This did not stop at bestowing alms; rather, it implied a genuine disinterest in material goods, to the point of achieving such exemplary poverty on a voluntary basis. Francis of Assisi allegorically transformed it into a Lady, whom he addressed in the language of *fin’amor*. In his youth before his conversion, which he first manifested in the service of lepers, then in the giving up of his worldly possessions, he had led a care-free life, steeped in courtliness and chivalry. Reference to these turns up later in his religious discourse, when he called himself ‘a new Knight of

Christ', comparing his religious brethren to 'the Knights of the Round Table, who hide in deserted places to indulge in prayer and meditation'.¹⁴⁷

Francis of Assisi's chivalric rhetoric must have carried considerable weight with warrior noblemen from around the Mediterranean, a significant number of whom became Franciscans, joined its third order or picked themselves confessors from among the minor orders. Any study on 'literacy' among their social class should mention the 'textual community' led by Arnaud de Villeneuve (1238–1313), a doctor to popes and to kings of Aragon and Sicily. In addition to his medical work, he wrote numerous theological treatises, often in Catalan. This use of the vernacular helped promote their circulation, for a group of high-ranking citizens had set up a workshop in Barcelona to copy and disseminate them. Arnaud and his disciples preached the radical poverty of the Spiritual Franciscans and they stressed on a prophetic eschatology that emphasized the impending end of the world. In 1317, they were condemned by the archbishop of Tarragona, who forbade them from living together in the same house, from wearing distinctive clothes, from preaching and starting new rites, but also from keeping and reading theological books in the vernacular. Many of them were members of circles close to the House of Barcelona, whose kings, whether in the Iberian Peninsula, the Balearic Islands, or Sicily, used to protect the Spiritual Franciscans or *fraticelli*, the advocates of absolute poverty who were persecuted under Pope John XXII (1316–1334). Among those laymen, half-religious beghards or members of the Franciscan third order, there were officers, apothecaries, doctors, notaries, and merchants of the king of Aragon (whose trade made them particularly receptive to literacy), but also urban knights.¹⁴⁸ Dissident religiosity was pervaded by written culture.

Confession and penance

The historian Jacques Le Goff considers canon 21 of the fourth Lateran Council (which made aural, secret confession at least once a year compulsory) as 'one of the major breakthroughs of mediaeval history'. In his opinion, self-examination before the confessing of sins should be considered 'a pioneering front which opens up in Christians' individual conscience, extending to laymen those soul-searching practices that used to

¹⁴⁷ Battais, 'La courtoisie de François d'Assise', 141–152.

¹⁴⁸ Aurell, 'Messianisme royal de la Couronne d'Aragon', 127–128.

be reserved for clerics'.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, André Vauchez, a specialist in mediæval spirituality, highlights the growing importance, from the twelfth century on, of the literal 'confession' of sins, 'an essential action' which henceforth came to define the whole sacrament. For obtaining forgiveness and the expiation of sins, confession began to take on even greater importance than the penance assigned by the priest to the sinner.¹⁵⁰

Confessing one's sins as one kneels down in front of a priest who is seated is humiliating and painful. It itself requires the ability to transcend oneself. As the hermit who hears his confession in the *Continuation of the Story of the Grail* (written between 1226 and 1230 by Gerbert de Montreuil) says to Perceval: 'Shame is the penance' (l. 14238). The priest took into account the effort made by the penitent, who came all the way to see him to humbly list his transgressions of the Ten Commandments. His sincerity could only be proof of repentance or contrition, an inner attitude that was endowed by twelfth-century theologians with even greater value than the confessing of sins and satisfaction through penance.¹⁵¹ That is why the priest, after listening to the penitent, would hardly ever fail to grant him absolution. He would, however, have assessed the gravity of the confessed actions and given advice on the behaviour to be adopted in similar circumstances in the future. Casuistry, the case-based method, emphasised in the confession manuals frequently used by priests, began to develop rapidly. A number of condensed documents in the vernacular, which listed the sins to be examined and confessed, also began to be used commonly by laypersons as a guide to their soul-searching.

The shame involved in confessing to the priest was probably even greater for the knight, who always found it difficult to overcome his pride, fostered by his social superiority, his habitually commanding role, and his refined sense of honour. Maybe he found even more difficulty in confessing—no differently from any peasant on his estate—to a local parish priest whom he may have considered ill-educated, and from whom he sometimes had to endure diatribes against excessive taxation and exactions. He would therefore tend to seek forgiveness for his sins from his castle chaplain, if he had one, or from a journeying mendicant friar, or the priest of a distant church. A collection of English *exempla* from the late Middle Ages describes how a knight who felt embarrassed about confessing to his local priest went incognito to the abbey of Westminster in Lon-

¹⁴⁹ 'Naissance du purgatoire', 1031.

¹⁵⁰ *La Spiritualité du Moyen Âge occidental*, 179.

¹⁵¹ Baldwin, *Aristocratic Life in Mediaeval France*, 226.

don to do so. The devil, cunningly dressed as a monk, hears his confession and gives him mock-absolution. The deceived penitent soon falls seriously ill, putting his soul in danger, but Saint Peter, the Holy Virgin, and Mary Magdalene eventually obtain his salvation.¹⁵²

Satisfaction was by then less demanding than it used to be, implying only a few discreet prayers, alms, and fasting. It obliged, for instance, the knight guilty of plundering and theft to return stolen goods. Gerald of Wales' *Gemma ecclesiastica* relates the story of a Brabant mercenary in Henry II's army who finds himself unable to enter Notre-Dame church in Châteauroux (in the Berry region of France), even though the doors are wide open. A monk points out to him that his plight most probably originates in some major sin, whereupon the contrite warrior confesses to him how, only the day before, he had robbed a poor widow of a cauldron, which he immediately sold for four deniers. His penance includes paying the woman the same amount, after which he enters the church without any resistance (I, 32).

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, satisfaction slowly became less public and less financially formalized than in past centuries. It might still—occasionally—remain spectacular, as in the case of Raimond VI of Toulouse, who was in 1209 flogged in front of the people, barefoot and wearing only sackcloth, for the murder of the pope's legate, according to Pierre des Vaux-des-Cernay (§ 77). Or rather than these external demonstrations of penance, moralists favoured self-examination and soul-searching. In addition, they emphasized the role of intention in the overall responsibility for one's deeds, and pointed out the importance of inner life, the dialogue with Christ, and the help of grace to overcome the evil impulses that may lie in waiting in believers' hearts. Increased knowledge of one's own transgressions of God's commandments and those of the Church and enhanced confidence in divine mercy made confession all the more frequent.

Because the knights' religious supervision and theological culture were greater than other social classes', they tended to be the main vectors for this internalization of penance. Around 1150, in *Chanson de Girart de Roussillon*, the Pope delivers a sermon intended to bring peace between two parties who had long been at war. His emphasis on the contrasting themes of hatred and forgiveness is most significant. 'I command you, in the name of God your Maker and the Holy Penance which comes to your help, bestowing its medicine upon the sinner, to remove from your hearts

¹⁵² British Library, Burney 361, fol. 150, quoted in Kaeuper, *Holy Warriors*, 181.

any war, resentment, ancient hatred, pride, and cruelty. Let your hearts be rid of envy and bitterness, and may you turn them into peace and kindness [...]. Indeed, he who dies with rank hatred in his heart must fear for his salvation' (l. 9395–406). In this call for repentance, what the pope stresses is the knights' inner state of mind rather than their misbehaviour, which the anonymous writer claims amounted to the burning down of churches, the mistreating of monks, the destruction of cities, and the impoverishment of the people. The same is true for the message of conversion in the Arthurian romances the nobility were so fond of. Since Chrétien de Troyes' *The Story of the Grail*, such narratives had consistently shown errant knights crossing paths with hermits, who were formerly warriors like themselves. They unburden themselves quite simply to the hermits in order to receive advice or guidance (or absolution if the hermit is a priest) and to receive communion from his hands. This kind of episodes are oft-recurring in the cycles of Brittany, because they meant to be exemplary.¹⁵³

'Is there not a warfare (*militia*) to man upon earth?' (Job, 7, 1). Job's remark, which was used and abused by Christian literature to refer to the struggle between good and evil, virtue and sin, God and the devil, is perfectly fitting for the chivalry warfare or *militia*. In the *Quest for the Holy Grail* (1225–1230), the hermit who listens to Lancelot's confession speaks of just such a psychomachia: 'Our Lord has lent you many a grace that you might be his knight and servant [...], but you have forsaken Him to serve His enemy and forever wage war upon Him. You have been the evil soldier, who deserts his master as soon as his wages are paid' (§82). The knight should thus first and foremost fight his passions, to which Lancelot once succumbed in his adulterous affair with Guinevere. Another early thirteenth-century Arthurian romance, the *Perlesvaus*, claims that there 'is no more beautiful chivalry but to abide by God's law: one must suffer for Him more than for others, for He likewise submitted His body to pain and hurt' (XI, l. 9060–9063).

To abide by the Ten Commandments, a warrior must endure suffering, just as Christ did on the cross. His real enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil, all of which tempt him away from his Creator. Following an ancient tradition, the *Chevalier Dé* ('The Knight of God'), a 948-octosyllable Anglo-Norman poem, expatiates on this spiritual struggle, which should occupy him more than any other. To defeat these foes, not only should the warrior pray and regularly attend the sacraments, but he should also inflict deprivations upon himself which prepare his body for

¹⁵³ Girbea, *Communiquer pour convertir dans les romans du Graal*, 123–157, 195–211.

the assault of his passions. That is why fasting, sexual abstinence, and penitent pilgrimage were so common in warrior circles. The wearing of haircloth or self-flagellation seem to have been much less common, even though they do appear in the *Quest for the Holy Grail*, where Lancelot puts a hairshirt (a painful shirt made of horse or goat's hair) over his bare torso, and has the hermit scourge him (§157). Such mortifications were monastic in nature and seldom practised by laymen.

In mediaeval Christianity, voluntary sacrifice was, together with prayer, the most common form of penance performed for the expiation of sins. Therefore, it was not only meant to be an imitation of the Passion of Christ, or to overcome the flesh, but to reduce the time and pain that the repentant believer was supposed to endure in Purgatory before being admitted to Paradise. In those days, theologians and preachers held suffering on earth to be less weighty by far than that which lay in store after death in order to purify a soul unfit for Heaven. They would therefore urge the faithful, among whom the aristocratic warriors were considered inveterate sinners, to accept and even seek out such suffering. In his collection of cautionary tales, Thomas de Cantimpré tells of a German knight who would 'frenetically indulge in theft and slaughter in his own country'. He is eventually judged and deservedly sentenced to be beheaded. Not only does he resignedly accept capital punishment, but he finds it ridiculously light in view of his crimes. He requires rather that his hands, forearms, feet, legs, and so on be slowly and progressively mutilated. As the agony continues, he sheds tears and asks witnesses for their prayers, saying that he ought to be thus 'tortured' (*cruciatus*, phonetically close to *crucifixus*, 'crucified') at least three times over (II, 51). His contrition matches his penitence, the unspeakable pain of which should help him escape Purgatory.

The *Tractatus de Purgatorio sancti Patricii* ('Saint Patrick's Purgatory'), written in Latin around 1180 by a Cistercian (perhaps Henry of Saltrey, in Huntingdonshire), was widely disseminated during the Middle Ages. It was also translated a number of times (first into Anglo-Norman French by Marie de France). It describes the descent into Purgatory of the Irish knight Owein, through a cave on Station Island, in Lough Derg ('Red Lake', County Donegal, Ireland), where Saint Patrick had founded a monastery. His aim was to endure pain to make reparation for all his sins after confessing, 'with intimate repentance' (l. 211), to his bishop. The cleric recommends that he become a canon or monk, but this sounds too light a penance to the knight. 'He would rather lead a novel and unusual chivalric struggle (*exercere militiam*)' (l. 256), resisting the devil in Purgatory, which he enters. There he is hooked by demons who drag him past pyres,

ovens, boiling cauldrons, and rivers of fire, in which crowds of sinners are suffering excruciating pain. By calling on Christ, he resists the temptation of transforming the journey into an adoration of the devil. Eventually, he ends up in Earthly Paradise, where souls who have just been purified in this Inferno are waiting to ascend to Heaven. Two archbishops greet Owein and tell him that, should he lead a righteous life, he will come back to them without having to endure the torments he has witnessed, which will be nonetheless lying in store for him should he misbehave. Back from his catabasis, the knight pledges to take the cross and ride away to Jerusalem, then to return to Ireland to found a Cistercian monastery, where he will become the humblest of servants, while remaining secular. In spite of the archbishop's recommendation to take the cloth, he considers that chivalry gives him the strength to resist the ordeals and terrible temptations he has just gone through in Purgatory. It helps him on the way to salvation, providing it is put heroically to the service of crusading Christianity.

The knight's martyrdom

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the agonistic, suffering nature of Christian asceticism was particularly prominent among aristocratic warriors. This is the central motif of a book by the American mediaevalist Richard W. Kaeuper published in 2009 and significantly entitled *Holy Warriors: The Religious Ideology of Chivalry*. Kaeuper shows specifically how knights considered the military career, a most demanding and dangerous trade, as penance in itself. To support his claim he quotes, among other authors, the jongleur Ambroise, who compared the deprivations endured by the crusaders in Richard the Lionheart's army to the Passion of Christ: 'T'was Wednesday of the Holy Week when God knew pain and travail bleak, that we, for our part, suffered from vigils and from fear and dread' (l. 1186–1192). The liturgical calendar re-enacts the suffering of Christ, in the very landscape of the Holy Land where it all took place. Equating the Crucifixion with the crusader's woes was thus facilitated.

Some texts make death in combat, especially against heathens or infidels, the guarantee of eternal salvation. One such is in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain*, when Bishop Dubricius addresses King Arthur and his knights in a harangue before their battle against the Saxons: 'It is your country which you fight for, and for which you should, when required, voluntarily suffer death; for that itself is victory, and the cure of the soul. For he that shall die for his brethren, offers himself a

living sacrifice to God, and has Christ for his example, who condescended to give his life for his brethren. If therefore any of you shall be killed in this war, that death itself, which is suffered in so glorious a cause, shall be penance and absolution of all his sins' (§147). The same speech was adapted into hexameters around 1250 by the cleric Guillaume de Rennes, who introduced the idea of martyrdom: 'Should you die in battle, you shall receive the eternal kingdom for the transitory kingdom. The purple of martyrdom, precious and priceless, is to be found in heaven, and surpasses any honour: reverence belongs to martyrs with Christ, himself a martyr' (VII, l. 176–181).

The idea that salvation should be guaranteed to a knight who dies for a just cause is overtly expressed in one version of *Aspremont*, a late twelfth-century *chanson de geste* which was popular among crusaders in 1190, according to the jongleur Ambroise. On the eve of a battle against the Saracens, the pope tells the Christian warriors: 'God will sit us to His right. It is in His name that I would like to take upon myself such sins as you will not have confessed with your own mouths. Your penance will be to smite your opponents mightily' (§236, l. 4308–4311). This passage, from the fifteenth-century Wollaton Hall manuscript, bears witness to a vague belief in the forgiveness for unconfessed sins and remission of sentences for crusaders who died on the battlefield. It could not have appeared very orthodox in the eyes of the copyist of a thirteenth-century manuscript of the same work (Bibliothèque nationale de France, fr 25529), who replaced 'such sins as you will not have confessed with your own mouths' (l. 4309) by 'will you please confess your sins here' (§236, l. 3593)! A slight lexical change—*voilloiz ci* (literally 'want here', hence 'will you [please]') for *sans boce* (literally 'without a mouth')—gives the sentence a totally different meaning. The version that advocates confession is much more in line with the sacramentary theology of the times.

The belief in the automatic salvation of the warrior dying on Crusade sometimes turns up in epic poetry. The idea of martyrdom in particular pervades the *Chanson de Roland*, the earliest and most famous text of this type. A few knights may have adhered to the idea, though it was at complete odds with scholastic theology, which exempted no one from confession, or at least, in extreme conditions, from contrition. In this respect, the words that were spoken (according to the Cistercian Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay) by Garcias de Lorte (1210–1217), bishop of Comminges, to the Albigensian crusaders just before the battle of Muret (1213) appear much more orthodox. After blessing them with a relic of the True Cross, he tells them: 'He who will fall in this glorious battle will forthwith reap eternal

reward, and the glory of the martyr, being freed from the pains of Purgatory, provided he has repented and confessed, or at least firmly pledged to recount to the priest, as soon as the battle is over, such sins as he could not confess beforehand' (§461). In all likelihood, warriors must have heard similarly worded exhortations—or rather sermons—many times. The enthusiasm shown in some *chansons de geste* for martyrdom on the field of honour, which exempts the martyr from confession, cannot possibly be generalized. Arthurian romances bear witness rather to the opposite (i.e. that confessing mortal sins to priests is, except in situations of extreme need, a *sine qua non* condition for gaining eternal life).

The need for confession partly explains the importance of religious support for crusaders, who were constantly in mortal danger. Many priests accompanied them on their expeditions, including the papal legate. It was perhaps one such priest, named Robert or Ralph, who wrote *De Expugnatione Lyxbonensi* ('The Conquest of Lisbon'), which relates how the Anglo-Norman crusader fleet took part in the capture of Lisbon from the Moors in 1147. He describes the measures that had been taken by the expedition leaders to ensure the sacramentary life of their warriors: 'Each boat was required to have a priest on board so that the same prescriptions as in parish churches might be observed [...]. Let every man confess and receive communion once a week on Sundays' (p. 56). The Crusade was considered a difficult and perilous pilgrimage, which necessitated a penitent life. It was in that respect that particular care was taken to safeguard the warriors' spirituality.

In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, considerable religious support would seem to have been available to knights. They could easily call on chaplains, parish vicars, regular canons, or mendicant brothers to administer to them confession. It was, however, just as easy for them to go to early mass in one of the many places of worship which were becoming ever more numerous during that period: the knights could also sometimes enter such places during the day for meditation. The new emphasis on lay access to sacraments administered by the Church hierarchy was directed at the knights first and foremost. Some mediaevalists, however, tend to play down the role of this sacerdotal mediation. For Richard W. Kaeuper's 'holy warriors', 'the general belief in hard knightly labour and merit seemed to have remained firm. They warmly believed that they had a special arrangement with the Lord of Hosts, with the Christ-Knight, and with the gracious queen of the heavenly court' (p. 193). This independence from the clergy is also something Anita Guerreau-Jalabert claims to detect when she notes that through 'the motif of the Grail [...], all the dominant

laymen contest, in imagination, the exclusive domination of the Church over relationships with the sacred'.¹⁵⁴ Lastly, Dominique Barthélemy raises the question of how accessible the priests themselves may actually have been for noblemen: 'We may question whether the Gregorian Church really wanted to improve laypeople, and above all the knights: didn't their sins make them dependent on, and subordinate to, the clergy? [...] Could it be the case that a brotherhood of most Christian knights, who were neither monks nor clerics, had begun to upstage the monks and clerics?'¹⁵⁵ However, few texts from the Middle Ages would appear to uphold these assumptions. Arguably the reason for this was that the texts were written by clerics who fully intended to preserve their influence over knights' consciences. Yet all the sources seem to concur on the effectiveness of the new attitude, which must have driven many more knights towards churches where they took advantage of the services of priests.

The Holy War is sometimes presented in epic poetry as an acceptable pathway towards salvation for knights, irrespective of how often they attend sacraments. However, the tone is very different in Arthurian romances written between 1190 and 1250 by clerics, or by jongleurs influenced by clerics. In these works, the celestial chivalry, embodied in a few almost angelical warriors such as Galahad, by no means rules out calling on priests or clerics. Most of the hermits who seem to crop up everywhere along the roads travelled by knights on their quest for the Grail had indeed been ordained, which enabled them to hear the warriors' confession and give them communion. Admittedly, the iconography of the times does not abound in representations of warriors receiving sacraments from priests. One example should be mentioned, however: the high-relief warrior dated around 1250 in the inner façade of Reims cathedral. A cassocked priest is giving the warrior the wafer, while the latter is standing with joined hands. He is wearing the knight's full equipment, including spear and sword, as if he were ready for an impending battle. In short, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, most Christian warriors had to abide by the motto 'outside the Church there is no salvation'. Even if they claimed their right to intimate, personal prayer, seldom did they reject the help of priest-administered sacraments. Similarly, their anticlericalism, mostly a position taken in opposition to the episcopate's power and wealth, seldom lead them as far as open heresy.

¹⁵⁴ 'Traitement', p. 259; 'affirmation de soi de l'aristocratie laïque face à l'autre fraction dominante de la société, l'Église', Ead., 'Le temps des créations', p. 214.

¹⁵⁵ *La Chevalerie*, 231.

Individuation and nobility of the soul

The existence of a religion that is autonomous for knights raises the question of the relation between the individual and the institution of the Church. In the twelfth, and even more in the thirteenth century, this dialectic between the personal and the collective shifted in two apparently contradictory directions. On the one hand, frequent confession emphasized the idea that salvation is a strictly individual matter, whereby conscience, thoroughly examined by each individual before confession, enjoys a degree of independence. In this respect, it is significant that in 1245 Pope Innocent IV permanently abolished the practice of putting a whole territory under interdict or excommunicating a whole group, adopting instead the criterion of personal liability. Similarly, Benedict XII in 1336 promulgated a Dogmatic Constitution asserting that each soul attains beatitude, Purgatory, or damnation through an individual judgement which takes place immediately after death, without having to wait for Doomsday and the collective judgement of mankind. On the other hand, a more sacramental, legal view on the part of the Church canonists gave increased weight to sacerdotal mediation in laymen's religious life.¹⁵⁶ The parallel emphasis on individual and institution proves that there was in practice no opposition between them, at least in those traditional societies where individualism did not exist in the modern sense that involved the break-up of the group, radical equality between men, the emphasis on free will, and a quest for individual privacy. Thus the incipient emergence of the individual in the twelfth century is by no means incompatible with new social and religious constraints.

As early as the second half of the twelfth century, the increased spread of heraldry and sigillography within the nobility bears witness to the rise of the individual, as represented by specific signs. The escutcheon might even appear as the image, or indeed the hypostasis, of its missing owner.¹⁵⁷ A prose romance from the 1230s, *The Death of King Arthur*, describes how Lancelot's emblazoned shield hung on a silver chain inside the nave of Saint Stephen's church in Logres, 'where he was admitted to the order of chivalry'. As an exhibit which was 'as richly displayed as a relic,' it was contemplated by a dense crowd of visitors, who wept for its departed owner (§120–121). There developed something akin to a cult of the knight Lancelot, who was symbolically present, through heraldry, at

¹⁵⁶ Moos, 'L'individu ou les limites de l'institution ecclésiastique', 273–274, 284–286.

¹⁵⁷ Bedos-Rezak, 'Signes d'identité et principes d'altérité', 51.

the very place of his dubbing. Even if blazons were family symbols, each knight could personalize his own. This differentiation was even legally guaranteed by the rule regarding 'brisures' (marks of cadency), which made it an obligation for the younger or bastard branch to alter some detail of their blazons, with only the eldest son keeping the full coat of arms. Such was also the case for the seal each nobleman would put on his charters. It bore an inscription with the name of its owner, who would sometimes leave marks or bodily offcastings in the wax—a piece of fingernail, a facial hair, fingerprints, or even the imprint of his teeth—all these being representations of his person which could not be of a more bodily nature. Yet the arms it portrayed referred to a noble house. Pending its democratization, the seal itself remained a token of belonging to the aristocratic stratum and the chivalric order. The representation of individuals could not always remain free from group belonging.

Frequent confession fostered soul-searching, a morality based on intention and reasoning, all of which cause men to experience some form of internal life. It was intelligence and will that were now supposed to rule gestures, and manners were adopted that were strictly codified in civility manuals. Introspection is also evident in autobiographies, a genre that many knights, engaged in adventures on distant lands, would try their hands at. Many historians analyse the novel convergence of all these factors in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries as an evolution towards individuation and the emergence of an autonomous subject, albeit one still strongly embedded in a wider society.¹⁵⁸

The phenomenon of return to the self and the emergence of the individual owes a lot to the intellectual renaissance of the times. By re-centring metaphysics on matter, the schoolmen, having rediscovered Aristotle, put forward the individuality of each substance. This philosophical evolution should be understood from a sociological viewpoint through the study of the clerks' practices. Even if they came together for classes or disputations, they set considerable store by their personal work of memorization, reading, or writing. Likewise, they held individual merit to be the sole criterion for university titles or chairs.¹⁵⁹ Scholarly excellence, which can only be acquired through hard work, should be rewarded with social recognition. It should be recalled that in the early twelfth century, Petrus Alphonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis* discovered, in an alleged letter from Aristotle to Alexander the Great, 'the true definition of nobility,' that is, not

¹⁵⁸ See the latest instalment in a vast field of literature: *L'individu au Moyen Âge*.

¹⁵⁹ Verger, *Les Gens de savoir*, 223–224.

silver or gold, but ‘instruction in the seven liberal arts, mastery of the seven crafts, and education in the seven virtues’ (IV, 4).

In Italy, from the fourteenth century onwards, it quickly became customary to promote any doctor in law to a title of nobility, thus legally confirming the social prestige bestowed by long studies. Italian lawyers of the late Middle Ages were accustomed to calling nobility ‘the daughter of knowledge’, and to referring to a ‘chivalry of toga or law’ achieved ‘through the bestowing of a literary baldric’. One of them, Cino de Pistoia, wrote in 1312: ‘The merit of science ennobles man. Indeed, according to the jurist Ulpian, a person should be called noble not because of birth, but because of the extent of his knowledge’.¹⁶⁰

The motif of the nobility of knowledge revisits the much more ancient idea of the nobility of virtue, whose roots are to be found in Hellenic philosophy, with frequent echoes in the Stoics. The poet Juvenal (c. 60–140) starts his eighth *Satire* with the questions: ‘What is the use of family trees? Why should one be famous just because of a long string of forebears?’ His answer to this was: ‘The one and only nobility is virtue’, a maxim that was repeatedly quoted in the twelfth century, in writings from a wide range of genres, for example the William of Conches’ *Moralium dogma philosophorum* (III, B, p. 54), Gautier de Châtillon’s *Alexandreis* (l. 104), John of Salisbury’s *Policraticus* (VIII, 15), Thomas Becket’s correspondence (ep. 96), Gerald of Wales’ *Education of a Prince* (I, 15), or Peter the Chanter’s *Verbum abbreviatum* (X, col. 47). The latter, a Parisian master, comments on Juvenal’s verse in a chapter devoted to overweening pride. In so doing, he was merely following an ancient Christian tradition that high birth and riches are threats to the virtue of humility, which is essential for the believer. In his *Dialogues*, Pope Gregory the Great wrote: ‘It is quite often that being born noble entails being ignoble in soul’ (II, 23).

Christian authors expand on the radical equality of all men, born from the same original couple, and above all of the baptized, who enjoy the same divine filiation. ‘Why do so many men stupidly boast their carnal nobility? Since we were all born of the same father and mother, Adam and Eve, all of us are equally noble [...]. We are all sprung from Adam’s side, and, through spiritual generation, from Christ’s, who redeemed us all with his blood’ (§290), contends the Dominican Stephen of Bourbon. All in all, Latin-language literature often denigrated the hereditary nature of nobility. Clerics, strongly inspired by pastoral views scorning wealth and honour, preached humility to the aristocracy.

¹⁶⁰ Gilli, *La Noblesse du droit*, 29–49, 66–89.

Many texts in the vernacular protest against the exclusivity of nobility of blood. It is perhaps natural that the priest Thomasin von Zerklare should claim in his treatise on morality that 'only he who achieves genuine good with heart and intelligence is noble' (l. 3860–3862). Elsewhere, praise of 'nobility of the heart' is to be found in the writings of those troubadours who, at the margins of Christian morals, extol adulterous *fin'amor*. Ramon Vidal de Besalu, writing about the 'castellan of a very small castle' whose name he cannot even remember, says that 'the nobility of the heart lifts people of low extraction to high positions' (l. 16–17). He goes on, in support of his claim, to quote two verses from a song by Perdigon (d. 1212): 'I know nothing about nobility but he who behaves better possesses more of it' (l. 74–75). Ramon's long song *So fo e-l temps qu'om era gais* ('The times when we were merry'), from which the above passage and quotation are taken, relates how a poor knight, endowed with just about every quality, manages to deceive a rich husband, a member of the highest nobility, but unworthy of his wife, following the comic pattern of *Castia gilos* ('The jealous husband punished'). Arnaut de Mareuil's *Ensenhamen* is sterner in tone as he defends the same principles: 'Neither the blood of high lineage, nor the power of gold and silver shall give any worth to him who does not have a golden heart' (l. 164–166).

Moral nobleness is a *topos* of thirteenth-century *langue d'oïl* authors. In his *Four Ages of Man*, Philip of Novara writes that those aristocrats who do not behave properly 'should be called neither noblemen nor Franks, for ancestors' nobility and worth only harm their unworthy descendants; there would be less shame should they be descended from villeins' (§214). Between 1240 and 1280, Baudouin de Condé, a minstrel at the court of the earl of Flanders, wrote *Li Contes de gentilleche* ('The tale of gentleness'), whose very title announces a meditation on nobleness and ethics. Throughout the 140 octosyllables, he rails against those aristocrats who forget all about nobility of the heart and behave like villeins. Lastly, Jean de Meun, ever the satirist, relates how, in primitive times, men made the mistake of giving up their possessions to the strongest one among them and to his troops, foolishly hoping they would be protected by him. In actual fact, they were oppressed by their inheritors, those 'ugly gluttons,' a single one of whom owns the wealth of twenty indigents (l. 9613–9669). The conclusion is obvious: 'Nobleness is born of a generous heart: gentleness of lineage is no gentleness at all, if generosity of the heart is missing' (v. 18623–8626).

Like intellectual aristocratism, which advocates the superiority of worthy scholars, the concept of nobility of soul began to spread

throughout northern Italy, where social mobility was the norm in urban areas and the wide school network promoted the notion of merit. Likewise, the system of communal government, albeit oligarchic in nature, was mostly in the hands of elected members. The troubadour Falquet de Romans, who lived at the courts of Piedmont and Lombardy between 1215 and 1230, claimed that the good lord ‘should not be looking at lineage, but replace any powerful person who may turn out to be bad, as the Lombards do, who elect their podestà’ (VII, l. 38–40). Other manuscripts have a variant: ‘as is done for priors and abbots’ (l. 40), who were elected by monks to their offices.

In the years 1304–1307, Dante Alighieri devoted most of the fourth chapter of his *Convivio* (‘Banquet’) to defending the claim that behaviour was more worthy than blood. He imagines himself debating with Emperor Frederick II, who had died half a century earlier. His targeting the emperor was perhaps due to the feudal system which the latter had encouraged in the Kingdom of Sicily in order to keep numerous knights in his service. His Melfi constitutions (1231) made dubbing the sole privilege of the noblemen, at a time when merchants’ sons in the north of the peninsula could be dubbed more easily. Dante defined ‘true nobility’ quite simply in terms of virtue or kindness, denying the word any other meaning, while holding villeiny to be evil, though without any social connotations: ‘Where Virtue is, there is / A Nobleman, although / Not where there is a Nobleman / Must Virtue be also’ (l. 101, §16, 19). Nobleness is thus rooted not in the body, but in the soul, which is much more noble (21–22). Only there does grace, that ‘divine seed’, operate, ‘adorning the soul’ (§24). Nobleness might even be reduced to this ‘divine grace, planted by grace in the human soul’ (§29). Therefore, it is wrong to think that it stems from marriage, estates, or palaces (§8), or even from previous centuries and ancient wealth (§10–14). The poet is prompt to criticize reactionary noblemen: ‘The rich will not see the vile turn noble’ (l. 61). But indeed, since Adam was noble, all of us are also noble (§15). This long text, full of anecdotes from Roman history, sentences from Aristotle, Cicero, and Boetius, and quotations from Old Testament books of wisdom and Gospel verses, appears all the more scholastic as it often uses ruthless syllogism and a *reductio ab absurdum* of the opposite side’s arguments. Even though it rejects all forms of violence, and thus has no revolutionary impact, it still pushes the principle of human equality to its ultimate consequences.

Dante, by the yardstick of our modern-day categories, might appear as an enlightened spirit. So do some cathedral school clerics, some trouba-

dours (sometimes of modest extraction) and some minstrels from Northern France. Their 'meritocratic' ideas probably did not go down well with most noblemen, who were particularly jealous of their prerogatives. Indeed, blood aristocrats would show their distance from common people with surprising frankness. Not only does Joinville proudly relate his squabbles with Robert de Sorbon, whose attire he finds far above the servile condition of Robert's parents, or the way Henry the Liberal offers a rich bourgeois to a poor knight as if he was offering a slave. He also very candidly mentions his own reply to King Saint Louis's question on the feet-washing ceremony of the Holy Thursday service: 'Sire, said I, never shall I be so unfortunate as to wash those villeins' feet!' (§29). He was thereupon scolded by the King, who urged him to follow Christ's teaching on such matters. Joinville's revulsion towards the needy and disdain for the *nouveaux riches* are merely manifestations of the nobility's deep-rooted mental habits. Those attitudes, however, met with growing disapproval, as revealed by Saint Louis's reply, which was influenced by Franciscan evangelism.

A century earlier, Hildegard of Bingen showed great pride in her noble origins, which she held to be a source of virtue. Around 1150, in a reply to 'mistress' Tenxwind of Andernach, who had blamed her for refusing to admit common women in her Rupertsberg monastery, the abbess reminds her that God puts each person—whom he knows perfectly—in his or her place, and that any desire to leave 'the lower order for the higher' is comparable to Adam's, or Satan's, rebellion. In contrast, the image that follows this biblical consideration is surprisingly trivial: 'Who would keep all his herd in the same stable? It would eventually be a free-for-all between oxen, donkeys, ewes, and billy goats' (*ep.* 52). Hildegard immediately cites the angelic hierarchy, from archangels to cherubs. Even if God loves them all, He didn't give them identical names. And she goes on to quote Job: 'Behold, God is mighty, and despises none: he is mighty in strength and wisdom' (36, 5). Even if, with Joinville, class prejudice translates into an almost physical form of disgust, in Hildegard's letter it is justified in more sophisticated ways, on the basis of a terrestrial transposition of the celestial pyramid of angels.

The argument of the necessity of coercive power exerted by a group of warriors, following the original sin that introduced wickedness and conflict in the world, was a recurring one in the Middle Ages, even if Jean de Meung mocked it. From a legal point of view, it was translated, as early as the twelfth century, into legislation that made dubbing the exclusive privilege of the nobility. Aristocratic chivalry continued to monopolize mili-

tary government for many centuries. Tournaments, where the aristocracy displayed, albeit festively, their military know-how, were also exclusively reserved for them. Heralds of arms would check that participants possessed the required four quarters nobility: otherwise, access to the tournament lists would be denied. Even though the individual, his intentions, his conscience, and his merit did assert themselves thanks to the spread of learning and the new pastoral movement, writing at the same time remained an effective way for the authorities to regulate entry into the highest categories of society. Only the king now delivered letters of ennoblement. Bureaucracy slowed down eleventh- and twelfth-century social mobility, or at least put it under the control of legitimate authority. The society of orders was still dominant.

Conclusion

The lettered knight is a twofold invention of the twelfth-century renaissance. On the one hand, new techniques of warfare and chivalric ideology reinforced aristocratic domination. The nobility was established as a restricted and tight-knit group, proud of their military identity and the superiority of their lineage. On the other hand, the rise of schooling and the spread of learning benefited first and foremost that same aristocracy, from whence came the most prominent clerics, but also the knights. The *miles litteratus* as a literary type did not spring out of nowhere, but was part of a groundswell that changed the face of the West. The backdrop to it included the sprout demography of lineages, the growth of cities, the increased availability of trade and the firm establishment of royal power. Progress has always been fostered by instructional effort, the locus of which was, first, the powerful and wealthy, and which later spread to the middle social categories. In the Middle Ages, the powerful asserted their domination through the use of arms, over which knights had a quasi-monopoly. This is why, after clerics, the acquisition of book knowledge, before the emergence of a solid, sizeable, and well-structured merchant class, was mostly the preserve of the warriors. Despite appearances, the notion of a cultured chivalry was no contradiction in terms. It is a logical consequence of the social prevalence of an armed nobility and the elitism of book knowledge, still reserved to a chosen few.

‘*Clergie*’ and chivalry, knowledge and military superiority are by no means incompatible. In the world representation of mediaeval intellectuals, both were part of the same triumphant shift from Greek Orient to that Latin Occident whose prevalence they assert. In comparison with antiquity, there is, however, a significant difference: it was clerics, ordained members of the Church hierarchy, mediators between God and laymen, who monopolized most science. For them it was forbidden, as the ultimate stain, to shed blood. Consequently, because it would have been in contradiction with their sacerdotal functions and the evangelical message of charity, it was also forbidden for them to embrace military careers. There were, however, exceptions to this rule. Some of Gregorian bishops led their troops against the emperor, his anti-pope, and his partisans, while soldier monks fought the infidels in the Holy Land. Their behaviour was of course considered scandalous by many of their peers. Bernard of Clairvaux’s praise for the Templar ‘new chivalry’ drew harsh criticism from his Cistercian brother Isaac de l’Étoile, who saw nothing in it but ‘the new monster’. All in all, the debate provides evidence that social and cultural reality was considerably more complex and flexible than the strict categories of canon law might suggest in their classifying of the respective rights

and duties of what Gratian called 'the two kinds of Christians,' clerics and laymen. The two orders were by no means watertight in respect to each other.

Could it be that the doves and the hawks detested each other? Hugues de Fouilloy claims that the former provide the feathers with which clerics write, while the latter hunts along with knights. The former symbolize the contemplative life, the latter the active life. It is no less true that Hugues sets them on one and the same pole. Their roosting together was no make-shift arrangement, but also a profound necessity. Cultured clerics, who graduated from cathedral schools or universities, shared many common characteristics with knights, the most obvious of which was birth: they had often sat on the same school benches in monasteries. Those who went on to take monastic oaths still rubbed shoulders with their secular brothers and cousins, whom they encouraged to join them in the cloisters, if only as converts late in life. The relations between secular clerics and knights were even closer. Chaplains, whether preceptors or parish schoolmasters, taught Latin to the knights' children, thus introducing them both to Roman classics and to Christian doctrine. Over and above the *trivium's* grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic, they would also impart to them a smattering of the sciences of the *quadrivium*: arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music. Medicine, history, and economy were also taught, and the whole mix was steeped in ethics. In direct continuation of Hellenic and Stoic education, the priest could only conceive of his teaching as a fully-rounded personal education. Being a charismatic and exemplary personage himself, his duty was above all the transmission of values.

The education of young girls was obviously part and parcel of the clergy's pedagogical syllabus. This appeared all the more important to them as mothers often taught children their first letters using psalters. In so doing, they would also teach them certain formulas of devotion (for example, the recitation of the hours or meditation on the Passion) which were based on the ability to read Latin. As with the boys, most feminine education took place through either the teaching of a female preceptor, attendance at a parish school, or a stay in a convent. It is nevertheless the case that women could, owing to their lifestyle, retain a privileged relation with the prayer book (with which they are often represented in iconography) until an advanced age. Their role was equally important in cultural patronage. Even if they did not have immediate access to the same resources as their husbands in patronising writers or jongleurs, they certainly knew how to coax their husbands into exercising such patronage. Like the prestigious banquet hall, their chambers were a special locus of

literary sociability. There they would read and discuss books with knights and clerks, and also listen to music and the songs of minstrels.

Ladies may have widely indulged in religious reading and the teaching of the rudiments to children, but few of them dictated or wrote pieces themselves. The clear exception is, to be sure, Marie de France, but in the troubadour corpus the proportion of *trobairitz* songs is actually minute. As for Beguines, their canonical status made them comparable to nuns. In short, the contribution of aristocratic laywomen in literary creation was still minimal in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Such was not the case with knightly writers, whose ranks swelled dramatically during the period. About fifty of them are to be found among the most famous troubadours. They almost always flaunt their warrior status in their short poems. For instance, Bertran de Born or Gui de Cavaillon achieved particular fame for their *sirventes* through which they spread propaganda for their respective sides in the campaigns of the Plantagenet empire or the Albigensian Crusade. Just as noteworthy were the German ministerials in the *Minnesänger* group, some of whom left a huge body of work: Wolfram von Eschenbach, for example, who was all too fond of the *topos* of false modesty of the poorly educated knight, or Hartmann von Aue, whose narratives demonstrate a profound interest in religion. Their examples are reminiscent of some writers of Arthurian French romances or of Norse sagas. Many such authors came from the lower nobility, for whom knowledge was a means to social promotion, as a means to furthering their careers at princely courts.

Knightly writers were profoundly steeped in the Christian culture they had received, along with letters, in early childhood. They did, however, also deal with the profane topics of love and war. Moreover, they used the vernacular, which had become increasingly common from the twelfth century onwards as a means of written communication. This was not the case of the notary-chroniclers of Northern Italian communes, who wrote in Latin in reminiscence of the Vulgate as well as Justinian's code or the Roman classics. In the Italian peninsula, knowledge of the writings of the ancients had been kept alive in an urban school network whose continuity had never been interrupted. Yet Dante clamoured for Cicero's idiom to be discarded in favour of the vernacular, with which he claims to entertain 'perfect love'. He goes on to say that it is through the mother tongue that every man establishes bonds of sociability and affection with his relatives or fellow-citizens. In this way, the poet clearly expresses the dialectic between orality (and the empathy it fosters) on the one hand and writing (represented by a language that is dead or at best foreign to real life) on

the other. This opposition cannot, however, be equated to the sacred-profane distinction as conceptualized by Dante, who would discuss the finest points of theology in Italian. All in all, the conflict between the two languages was possibly less sharp than the Florentine genius—who paradoxically wrote his *De vulgari eloquentia* ('On the Eloquence of the Vernacular', 1303) in Latin!—would have us believe. It was also the vernacular that was used, in Dante's time, by several memorialists who wrote first-person narratives of their overseas adventures. The crusades opened up new horizons, engaging participants in a journey that was also an internal one. During that period, autobiography owed a lot to interaction with rich and ancient civilizations, whose sharply focused otherness stimulated many a lettered knight's 'reflection' (both in terms of thought and return on oneself).

The general rise of lay culture benefited first social organization and its legal superstructure. A pragmatic type of 'literacy' helped noblemen to perceive the legal subtleties of a contract, draft the minutes of a deliberative assembly, exchange letters with their allies, plead eloquently before a court, or analyse the account books kept by the managers of their estates. The lords would 'enrol' and 'control' their vassals, servants, clients, or serfs through the parchment 'rolls' which set out in writing their services and levies. However, to reduce their literary capacity to legal and administrative skills would not do justice to the extent and the scope of their knowledge. Among the knights, too busy with their military training and campaigns, there may certainly have been philistines who considered reading effeminate and quasi-illiterates hardly able to recognize letters of the alphabet. But there were also highly proficient Latinists (especially in Italy); outstanding vernacular romance writers; poets who were skilful verse improvisers; and the writers of memoirs who could relate their past adventures with gusto. As mediaevalists cannot possibly advance statistics illustrating the various degrees of culture within the lay aristocracy, they must uphold the admittedly vague and intuitive impression that there was a general progress of literacy, reading, and book knowledge in these circles. Similarly, they emphasize the importance of women in the spreading of such knowledge, with mixed roles as educator mothers, literary patronesses, or psalmodizing widows.

Even though posited by some historians, the opposition between bureaucracy and *belles-lettres* needs to be examined afresh. For the Middle Ages, this opposition looks as overly rigid as the tight separation between writing and orality, learned and popular culture, or the sacred and the profane. Pragmatic writing never rules out writing that entertains. At court,

which had become the focus of all power, it was perhaps as much through *belles-lettres* as through bureaucracy that the dominant classes asserted their prevalence. In the curial milieus to excel in poetry and music, in mundane debates, or thanks to literary patronage, resulted in fame, reputation, and honour, values which were essential for the conquest of power. Lastly, even if it was a pose, the disinterested detachment that the poets put on display was, perhaps, not so remote from the aristocratic mindset. Literary creation, for one's own pleasure or for others, was part of the same type of magnanimity or altruism that resulted in disproportionate generosity, going as far as potlatch. Poetry and prodigality converged in extravagant feasts during which the nobility would spend a number of hours together and proclaim their privileged position. In these exhilarating moments, shared by noblemen who were far removed from the common people, they would display their class solidarity and specific identity.

The model of the wise king, set against its opposite the 'crowned ass', trickled down from the apex to the base of the aristocratic pyramid. Knights were fascinated by it and did their best to imitate it. Its prestige informs various texts in praise of the Prince who brought together, in the words of Gerald of Wales, 'arms and toga, martial arts and letters'. Romance heroes exemplified the same values: Lancelot of the Lake is both knight (*Ritter*) and clerk (*Pfaffe*); Alexander the Great was schooled in Aristotelian philosophy and went on to become the greatest conqueror in history. The knight had a duty to embody both strength (*fortitudo*) and wisdom (*sapientia*), in imitation of the great warriors of Greece and Rome who were rediscovered by the twelfth-century renaissance. In those days, cunning and strategy were often thought to be learnt from books. The monk John of Marmoutier relates how Geoffrey le Bel succeeded in conquering the stronghold of Montreuil-Bellay after reading Vegetius. It was no coincidence that the Count of Anjou simultaneously practised both 'civil arms and liberal studies'. Such knowledge was indeed 'liberal'—free and in no way under the yoke of bureaucratic efficiency. As free indeed as the noblemen themselves were, but it still opened the doors to otherwise impregnable fortresses, and it likewise prepared the warrior for victory. It subtly combined tactical intelligence and brute force.

The synonymy of *curia* ('court') and *schola* ('school') is fully justified. It is a reminder that many children received extensive education at the court of lords, princes, or monarchs. From Guibert de Nogent's humble preceptor to the scholars who gravitated around Chancellor Thomas Becket, many were resident tutors in castles, in charge of instructing the offspring of the lord of the place and the warriors in his retinue. They

supplied the castle chapel with liturgical and theological manuscripts. They could also provide the lord with profane books, beautifully calligraphed and enlightened, to be displayed on lecterns in the reception rooms of the palace. Like clerks, jongleurs belonged to the category of cultural professionals, albeit more profane and vernacular. These specialists in the performance of literary works were often experts at compositional techniques, and these they could transmit to the lettered knights. At the lower end of this cultural osmosis, the minstrel would transfer his skills to the secular courtier, whom he initiated into his lyrical, epic, and vernacular repertoire. He would, moreover, show him how to succeed in oral or musical performances given in public. Aristocratic troubadours, and the jongleurs in their service, would often enter the rhetorical equivalent of jousts in the form of *jeux partis*. These *tenzos* and *partimens* reveal not disdain but rather the attraction and repulsion between the noble creator and his common interpreter. They are reminiscent of the poetic debates on the superiority in love of clerks or knights, the hypostases, respectively, of wisdom and strength. Above all, they reflect the atmosphere of princes' and lords' evening gatherings, during which participants would listen to the reading of romances, sing their own songs, and passionately discuss these and all such literary works. Both minstrel and knight were most taken with vernacular literature on love and war, for which clerks would provide Latin and other learned references.

Ever since antiquity, educators have been concerned not merely to transmit knowledge to their pupils but rather a form of wisdom. The acquisition of facts was supplemented with the formation of the individual. The Greco-Latin tradition made the educator a charismatic figure, a master who groomed young persons in the virtues of honesty (*honestum*) and efficiency (*utile*) that were conducive to justice and peace. These principles were Christianized by the Church Fathers, who transposed them in a fundamental way to a religious level. Mediaeval intellectuals viewed them in terms of the common good, or protection of the weak by the powerful, through the perspective of *pax Dei* and individual salvation. All of these motifs were integrated into the Stoic, Neoplatonic, and Aristotelian discourses of twelfth- and thirteenth-century moral philosophy. This was indeed how they came to appear in treatises on ethics, characterized by high degrees of abstraction with a multitude of erudite references accessible only to clerics who had followed long courses of study. Yet echoes of such treatises would crop up in much more modest manuals which provided practical moral guidelines to common people. During that period, the writing and increased dissemination of mirrors to princes, didactic

treatises and manuals on good manners are all evidence pointing to a vast enterprise of communication.

The secular elites were the prime targets of the clerics' moral strictures. Exercise of control over their weapons would appear to have been the main objective of this far-reaching programme for the civilization of mores. According to Church intellectuals, the knights ought to place their weapons in the exclusive service of Christianity under the orders of legitimate authorities. Such arguments developed in parallel with the consolidation of royal powers, which tended towards the monopolization of coercive power and violence of any kind to the disempowerment of independent castellans. Because they were at once ethical, political, and religious, such ideas laid the groundwork for the ideology of chivalry. This ideology found expression in persuasive or 'performative' discourses aimed at transforming aristocratic behaviour, mostly through songs and romances composed by secular clerics or the minstrels in their entourage or frequenting the monasteries. In this way, paradoxically, entertaining became a means of converting.

Of all the moral messages conveyed by 'clergie', the need for a knight to exercise control over his covetousness and anger is most prominent. Pillaging must be banned from his code of behaviour. Not only did preachers condemn it on battlefields and in military campaigns but also in any seigneurial levy which exceeded customary levels. It was because of the practice of robbery, they claimed, that thieving knights could flaunt their luxuries that contrasted so markedly with the general poverty. The preachers said they 'robbed', the verb being a near homonym of 'robe',¹ during a period when sartorial appearance was a marker of social status. They should instead look after 'widows and orphans' in accordance with the terms of the oath they had taken at their dubbing. In other words, they should look after the poor and oppressed and bestow alms on them instead of stealing what little these unfortunates possessed. 'Thou shalt not steal' was a commandment that was still difficult for the knights to follow. As children, they would have become hardened by living on their own far away from the family castle and would have needed to steal to survive. According to Hildebert de Lavardin, Hugues de Semur, the future abbot of Cluny, when he was in his teens, 'loathed more than anything having to take part in the spoliations and pillaging' his fellow apprentices in the military trade engaged in. Those restless *juvenes* would roam the country

¹ The pun they used in French was 'dérobent' ('steal', 1st person plural), phonetically identical to 'des robes'.

and ply their military know-how in the service of anyone willing to pay, living off their bounty. Once they had settled down as adults they would overtax the peasants on their estates, like the pillaging castellan in an English cautionary tale who was suspended over the yawning gulf of Hell, held only by five flimsy ribbons. Even if knights squandered everything they purloined on extravagant feasts and the mass distribution of gifts, the *ad status* sermons were constant reminders that theft remained one of their most distinctive professional sins.

It was admittedly easier for a knight to avoid maiming or slaying his fellow knights than to be persuaded to desist from pillaging. Because he was aware that his opponent was as noble as himself, he would readily spare his life, perhaps in the hope that the favour would be returned some day. In addition to such professional ethics, or rather class solidarity, there must be added the ceaseless preaching of clerics against the gratuitous violence of the knights, described by Raymond Lull as the ‘devil’s fiends’ or ‘widow-makers’. Clerical aversion regarding bloodshed, even in war-time, went back a very long way. It did not leave warriors untroubled, if only because of their fear of eternal damnation. Consequently, it would eventually reinforce royal power, the sole guarantor of public peace. Even as clerics spread the evangelical message of charity in their preaching, they put their knowledge at the service of the prince. On the one hand, they fashioned a consistent political ideology in his support, which was later to be propagated through speeches and writings. On the other hand, they worked in central and peripheral administration, thus reinforcing their power throughout the land. They played a critical role in the genesis of the modern state by aiding the concentration of military, coercive, and repressive powers in the hands of the king. Their contribution was a key element in the building up of a powerful monarchy.

The princely monopoly over armed constraint did restrict the violence knights would freely exert inside and outside their estates. This was the beginning of the taming of the warring nobility. They were enlisted in the service of the royal army at least forty days a year. They could also go crusading in the Holy Land, a form of struggle that was encouraged by the papacy itself. Chivalry was now accepted by intellectuals and acknowledged by the Church, and this confirmed the social status and professional deontology of the knights. Knighthood became a full-fledged order, accessible through the specific rite of dubbing, a ceremony in which priests and bishops participated in more readily than before, blessing the weapons and preaching his new duties to the aspiring knight. This development owed much to the spread of learning, which devised a legal framework for

knightly status, offering an ideology which had been carefully thought out in schools by teachers such as Alain de Lille, John of Salisbury, and Robert de Courson.

So-called 'courtly' love may have reflected a number of attitudes that were peculiar to the nobility, but they were ultimately, if not an 'invention', at least a construct of twelfth- and thirteenth-century intellectuals, who defined its main features in their writings. From then on, the lady found herself at the centre of the amorous relation, whose various stages she authoritatively defined. Her very vacillations taught her lover the moderation that purifies desire. By and large, this self-control was made into an absolute standard of behaviour in social life. Manners, strongly encouraged by females and laid down in writing in civility manuals, were the touchstone for each of the knight's gestures. Their purpose was to pacify human relations, especially at court, where power struggles and a degree of promiscuity would fire up conflicts and tensions. Codes of etiquette did more than merely impose a simple mask behind which political ambition could be concealed: they promoted teamwork in the prince's administration and army. They were a token of affable sociability, involving particularly a smiling countenance, a dignified gait, and suitable attire. They were most obvious during meals, where the communicative excitement of eating tended to bring commensals closer. The perfect courtier was supposed to be a paragon of elegance, but also, and more profoundly, of gentleness. In the philosophical context of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, appearance was considered to reflect profoundly a person's fundamental identity.

Self-control in the service of others was the key element of the moral reform programme that the clerks set before the knights. It was a feature of Stoic-style friendship, but which was made into a theological virtue by mediaeval theology. The love of others and the love of God were thus conflated. Around 1215, the devotional practices made popular by priests for laymen, and above all for noblemen, were mostly focused on the worship they owed to the Creator and Redeemer. But they were also supposed to foster better feelings in the nobles towards any Christian person, regardless of his or her milieu. Religion was thus steeped in the very same courtliness that increasingly regulated relationships within the nobility. For Saint Louis, *prud'homie* referred to the civility of piety, which laid out a sincere form of spirituality in the place of the external Pharisaism of the Beguine or bigot. The pastoral soul-searching, contrition, and confession played an important role in that quest for interiority that makes an individual what he is. It coincided with the spreading of written culture or

‘clergie’ within the aristocracy, providing the latter with an intellectual tool that would result, at least in the long term, in a critical questioning of its own privileges. With the spread of learning, notions of personal worth or nobility of soul developed further among the elites. A few centuries later, they would eventually undermine the social dominance of blood aristocracy. Writing and reading, far from enslaving the weak, have contributed to setting them free.

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Index

- Abbot, juggler, 134
 Abel, biblical character, 257
 Abelard. *See* Peter Abelard, 44, 53, 185, 200, 210–1, 356
 Aber Cofwy (Laugharne, Wales), 143
 Abingdon (Oxfordshire, England), 69
 Abundus of Huy, 53
 Acerbo Morena, 29, 80, 195
 Achilles, hero of the Greek mythology, 23, 76, 124
 Adam of Eynsham, 246
 Adam, biblical character, 84, 107, 205, 246, 258, 384, 386, 387
 Adela of Champagne, Queen of France, 120
 Adela of Louvain, Queen of England, 116
 Adelaide, niece of Laurent archdeacon of Poitiers, 212
 Adele of England, Countess of Blois, 223–4
 Ademar of Chabannes, 59
 Adenet le Roi, 114
 Adrastus, Greek King, 110
 Aelis de Condé, 64
 Aelis, character of a song, 297
 Aélis, fictional daughter of an Emperor, 117
 Ælred of Rievaulx, 72
 Aeneas, mythological character, 117, 124, 140, 154
 Agnes of Weimar, 190
 Aiceline Unaud de Lanta, 349
 Aimar, Viscount of Limoges, 151
 Aimeric de Peguilhan, 102, 328
 Alan IV Fergent, Duke of Brittany, 83
 Alain de Lille, 231, 239, 242, 255, 262, 267, 269, 280, 285, 399
 al-Andalus (Iberian Peninsula), 267
 Alard de Cambrai, 345
 Albéric de Pisançon, 40
 Alberon de Montreuil, Archbishop of Treves, 56
 Albert I of Habsburg, King of the Romans, 309
 Albert of Stade, 196
 Albert the Great, 200
 Albi (Tarn, France), 74
 Aleaume de Clari, 56
 Aleppo (Syria), 145
 Alexander III, Pope, 49, 72
 Alexander Neckam, 24
 Alexander of Hales, 136
 Alexander the Great, Emperor, 21, 39, 76, 110, 124, 236–7, 349, 383, 395
Alexander, decasyllabic poem, 343
 Alexander, father of Cliges, 332
 Alexandre de Paris or de Bernay, 20, 25, 39
 Alfonso I, King of Aragon, 37, 141, 148, 151, 154, 177, 179, 180, 191–2
 Alfonso II, King of Aragon, 141, 148, 151, 154, 177, 191–2
 Alfonso III, King of Aragon, 177
 Alfonso IV, King of Aragon, 179–80
 Alfonso X, King of Castile, 129, 166, 178, 295, 313, 367
 Alfonso, Count of Poitiers, 305
 Alfred the Great, Anglo-Saxon King, 138
 Alfred, author of a *Life of St Anthony*, 85
 Aliscamps (Arles, Provence), 239
 Al-Mansura (Egypt), 273
 Alnwick (Cumbria, England), 73
 Amalric I, King of Jerusalem, 91
 Amanieu de Sescas, 119, 292–4, 296, 306, 309–10, 317, 326, 343, 363

- Amaury of Montfort, 261
 Ambroise, trouvère, 127, 378, 379
 Ambrose of Milan, 30
 Amicie de Gaël, Countess of Leicester, 358
 Amiens (Picardy, France), 139, 198
 Amphiaras, mythological Greek priest, 20
 Ancona (Marche, Italy), 60, 78
 Andernach (Palatinate, Germany), 189
 André, brother of Bernard of Clairvaux, 296
 André le Chapelain, 120, 321, 332, 350
 Anjou (France), 2, 22, 24, 72, 96, 111, 145, 146, 153, 166, 178, 185, 198, 252, 261, 336, 395
 Anlaf, King of Denmark, 138
 Anne, St, 184
 Anselmo de Orto, 78
 Antioch (Minor Asia), 51, 82, 145, 172
 Apollonius of Tyr, 124, 155, 351
 Apprise de nurture, 316
 Aquileia (Udine, Italy), 170
 Archambaud de Bourbon, 124
 Arezzo (Toscana, Italie), 78
 Argenteuil (Ile-de-France), 210–1
 Aristotle, Greek philosopher, 3, 21, 22, 31, 40–1, 54, 78, 233, 236, 240, 255, 337, 358–9, 383, 386
 Arles (Provence, France), 57, 153, 154, 239
 Arnaud de Bonneval, 372
 Arnaud de Palou, 58
 Arnaud de Villeneuve, 219, 373
 Arnaut de Mareuil, 281–2, 285, 292, 323, 358, 385
 Arnaut Guilhem de Marsan, 289, 292, 294, 300–1, 329, 351, 362
 Arnoul II, Count of Guînes, 87, 90, 191
 Arnoul II, Lord of Ardres, 85, 131, 261
 Arnoul, Bishop of Lisieux, 49
 Arnoul, Bishop of Soissons, 245, 338
 Arras (Flanders, France), 156, 166, 169, 203
ars dictaminis, 79
 Arsur (Palestine), 273
 Artaud de Nogent, 302
 Arthur, mythical King, 24–5, 39, 44, 72, 84–5, 91, 93, 109, 113, 116, 143, 159, 166, 170, 188, 197, 206, 214–5, 241, 250–1, 256, 265, 282, 308, 329, 331, 332, 351, 355, 362, 378
 Astrolabe, son of Peter Abelard, 210, 290, 307, 315, 356, 358
 astronomy 13, 40, 48, 50, 63, 185–9, 343, 392
 Athelstan, Anglo-Saxon King, 138
 Athens (Greece), 25, 178
 Aucassin and Nicolette, 341–2
 Audrey, St (Ethelreda, Queen of Northumbria), 214–5
 Augustine of Hippo, St, 25, 44, 135, 169, 233, 255
 Augustus, Emperor, 25, 130, 321, 359
aula, 89, 105–6, 113, 144, 315, 326
 Aulne (Gozée, Belgium), 327
 Aulus Gellius, 96
 Austorc d'Aurillac, 273
 autobiography, 43, 47, 176, 394

 Babel, Biblical town, 13
 Babylon (Iraq), 305
 Badulf, Saxon prince, 138
 Baibars, sultan of Egypt, 273
 Baldwin II, Count of Guînes, 85–7, 90, 249, 261
 Baldwin III, King of Jerusalem, 91
 Baldwin V, Count of Hainaut, 49
 Baldwin, foster brother of Roland, 298
 Balearic, 179, 373
 Bamberg (Bavaria, Germany), 248
 Ban, King of the Arthurian legend, 49, 250, 257
 banquet, 112, 124, 138, 141, 144, 146, 307, 309–10, 364, 370, 392
 Barcelona (Catalonia), 58, 64, 87, 108, 141, 177–81, 193, 238, 373
 Bar-sur-Aube (Champagne, France), 166
 Barthélemy, Dominique, 17, 104, 275, 277, 381
 Baudouin de Condé, 385
 Baudri of Bourgueil, Bishop of Dol (Brittany), 115, 336
 Baudri de Florennes, 56
 Bavaria (Germany), 48–9, 96, 203, 248, 295
 Bayeux, tapestry of, 94, 112

- Beatrice, hero of *Raoul de Cambrai*, 305
 Beatrice de Say, 372
 Beatrice of Burgundy, 195, 199
 Beatrice of Luxembourg, 119
 Beatrice of Nazareth, 221
 Beaucaire (Languedoc, France), 141–2, 152
 Beaumanoir (Picardy, France), 159
 Bec (Normandy, France), 23, 50–1, 94, 366
 Beguines, 219, 221, 393
 Belle aux Blanches Mains, 188
 Belle Doette, 196
 Benedeit, author of *Saint Brendan's Voyage*, 116
 Benedict, prior of San Michele de Chiusa, 59
 Benedict of Aniane, 53
 Benedict of Nurcia, St, 50
 Benedict XII, Pope, 382
 Benevento (Campania, Italy), 167
 Benoît de Sainte-Maure, 157, 223, 288, 345–6
 Bérard de Mondidier, 298
 Bergen (Norway), 168
 Bernard de Ventadour, 149, 156, 205, 322, 323–5
 Bernard of Clairvaux, St, 4, 54, 204, 208, 255, 270, 296, 298, 340, 353, 366, 391
 Bernard of Menthon, St, 45
 Bernard Silvestre, 130, 135
 Bernardo Maragone, 80
 Bernat Desclot, 177–8
 Bernier, epical character, 305
 Bérout, 326
 Bertelai le Roux, Arthurian character, 257
 Berthe, fictional daughter of the Emperor of Byzance, 187
 Berthe, pupil of Regensburg monastery, 188
 Bertran de Born, 102, 132, 151, 153, 298, 328, 393
 Bertran de Lamanon, 132, 152–3
 Bertrand Raimbaud, 141
 Berzé (Mâconnais, France), 58, 174
 Beuern (Bavaria, Germany), 347
 Bezzola, Reto R., 31, 111, 336, 340–1
 Blanca, wife of Guilhem de Latour, 207
 Blancandin, 46
 Blanche of Castile, Queen of France, 152
 Blanche of France, sister of King Philip III, 114
 Blanchefleur, mother of Tristan, 188, 284
 Bledfri ap Cadifor, 142–3
 Bledgabred, fictional King of Britain, 138
 Bliscavret, character of Marie de France, 215
 Blois (Loir-et-Cher, France), 84, 111, 187, 209, 223, 306, 346, 363, 372
 Blondel de Nesle, 325
 Bohemia, 195
 Bohemond I, prince of Antioch, 51
 Bohort, Arthurian character, 180
 Bolesław III, Duke of Poland, 42–3
 Bologna (Emilia-Romagna, Italy), 41, 49, 57, 60–1, 66, 78–80, 181
 Bonaventure, St, 220
 Boncompagno da Signa, 61, 78, 80, 83, 134
 Boniface de Castellane, 103, 153
 Boniface de Montferrat, 173
 Boniface VIII, Pope, 167
 Bonizo, Bishop of Sutri, 259
 book of hours, 28
 Bordeaux (Gironde, France), 178
 Boureau, Alain, 7, 28, 237
 Brabant, 114, 115, 186, 375
 Bregenz (Austria), 164
 Breuil (Limousin, France), 142
 Brian Fitz Count, 83–4
 Brian of the Isles, Arthurian character, 84
 Brindisi (Puglia, Italie), 180
 Brunetto Latini, 95, 166–7, 359
 Bumke, Joachim, 31, 108, 117, 132, 140, 157, 165, 224, 255, 296, 326, 351
 Burgundy, 58, 91, 127, 174, 195, 199, 208, 359
 Buzançais (Berry, France), 245
 Cabra, juggler, 137
 Cabrera, Catalan family, 137, 154, 193
 Caen (Normandy, France), 151, 310, 360
 Caerleon (Wales, Britain), 213
 Caesarea (Palestine), 273
 Caffaro de Castrofino, 80
 Cain, biblical character, 257
 Calabria (Italy), 46, 77

- Calixtus II, Pope, 199
 Callisthenes of Olynthus, Greek pseudo-author, 39
 Calogrenant, Arthurian character, 113, 124
 Cammarosano, Paolo, 10
 Campaldino (Toscana, Italy), 167
 Candace, fictional lover of Alexander the Great, 236
 canons regular, 5, 54–5
 Canute the Great, king of Denmark, 283
 Caprona (Toscana, Italy), 167
 Capua (Campania, Italy), 79
 Caraduë, fictional prince of Vannes, 44
 Carcelois, Arthurian castle, 265
 Carduel, Arthurian castle, 113
 Carmarthen (Wales), 143
 Cassiodore, founder of the monastery of *Vivarium*, 234
 Castellazuelo, Aragonese family, 193
 Castellbó, Catalan family, 192
 Castelloza, *trobairitz*, 219
 Castelnaudary (Languedoc, France), 134, 152, 261
 Castile, 66, 129, 166, 178–9, 237, 266, 267, 295, 313, 367
 Castres (Languedoc, France), 74–5
 Catalonia, 5, 10, 87, 177–9, 207
 cathedral schools, 14, 31, 55, 63, 146, 191, 196, 211, 276, 284, 288, 392
 Cavallo Guglielmo, 10
 Cecilia of Sandford, 185, 186
 Cercamon, troubadour, 137, 321, 336
 Chalon-sur Saône (Burgundy, France), 42
 Champagne (France), 13, 23, 24, 90, 91, 96, 111, 115, 117, 120, 155, 169, 176, 210, 302, 332–3, 372
 Chanson de Landri, 124
 Chanson de Roland, 379
 chaplain, 85, 124, 189, 212, 239, 249, 294, 360, 374
 Charlemagne, Emperor, 39, 48, 72, 124, 126, 139, 154, 238, 295
 Charles I of Anjou, King of Sicily, 2, 153, 178, 252
 Chartres (Eure-et-Loir, France), 7, 47, 110–1, 130, 255
 Chastoiement, 64, 66
 Châteauneuf-de-Randon (Gevaudan, France), 126
 Châteauroux (Berry, France), 375
 Châtillon-sur-Seine (Burgundy, France), 54
 Chauvency (Lorraine, France), 120
 chess, 37, 39, 93, 184, 187, 252–3, 305, 318, 358
 Chevalier à la Cotte Mautailée, 180
 Chevalier Dé, 376
 Chrétien de Troyes, 18, 22, 25, 84, 91, 115, 117, 120–1, 130, 156, 158–9, 161–4, 186, 188, 197, 204, 243, 252, 256, 264–5, 281, 301, 323, 330, 332, 362, 365, 376
 Christina of Markyate, 198
 Christine, nun of Wilton, 190
 Chronicle of Goseck, 190
 Cicero, Roman author, 3, 19, 22–3, 27, 30, 47, 63, 146, 179, 191, 210, 233, 255, 284, 315, 337, 345, 386, 393
 Cid, 106
 Cino de Pistoia, 384
 Circe, character of the Greek mythology, 111
 Cîteaux (Burgundy, France), 54, 174
 Clairvaux (Burgundy, France), 23, 211, 340, 372
 Clanchy, Michael T., 2, 9, 57, 90, 198, 203
 Clara, pupil of Valnegre, 191
 Claudian, Latin poet, 74
 Clemence d'Auxonne, Duchess of Zähringen, 116
 Clemence of Zähringen, Duchess of Swabia, 203
 Clémence-Marguerite of Burgundy, 293
 Clement III, anti-pope, 259
 Clement V, Pope, 275
 Clement, abbot of Neath, 68
 Clement, St, 365
 Clermont (Auvergne, France), 249, 267, 268
 Cléry-lès-Pernois (Picardy, France), 172
 Clovis, Merovingian King, 124
 Cluny (Burgundy, France), 42–3, 45, 118, 210, 234, 271, 397
 Cologne (Westphalia, Germany), 140, 165, 309

- Compiègne (Picardy, France), 159
 Comtat Venaissin (Provence, France), 152, 349
 Conon de Béthune, 156, 324
Conquest of Lisbon, 73, 380
 Conrad IV, King of the Romans, 165
 Conrad of Ballhausen, 29
 Conrad of Mure, 130, 135
 Conrad of Winterstetten, 165
 Constance of Aragon, Queen of Sicily, 192
 Constance of Foix, 192
 Constance of Hohenstaufen, Queen of Aragon, 181
 Constance, wife of Ralph Fitz Gilbert, 92, 115
 Constantinople (Byzantium), 56, 156, 160, 173, 174, 188, 267
Contenance de table, 310
 Cornwall (England), 212, 213, 304
 Couronnement de Louis, 129
 Cracow (Poland), 42
 Credenhill (Herefordshire, England), 91
 Crouch, David, 2, 17, 33, 72, 225, 250, 278
 crusade, 26, 51, 56, 73, 80, 84, 127–8, 131, 138, 140–1, 151, 171–5, 177–8, 179, 183, 193, 218, 252, 261, 266–70, 272–3, 279, 379–80, 393
 Curzola (Korčula, Dalmatia), 166
 Cyprus, 18, 158, 174–6, 251, 361
- Dædalus, character of Greek mythology, 124, 358
 Dagobert, brother of Peter Abelard, 57
 Dalon (Perigord, France), 151, 299
 Damietta (Egypt), 174–5
 Daniel of Beccles, 106, 253, 306, 310, 314, 316, 320
 Dante Alighieri, 27, 167, 386
 Dares the Phrygian, Latin pseudo-author, 158
 Dauphiné (France), 199
 David, author of *Life of Henry I*, 17, 93, 124
 David, biblical King, 45, 136
 David I, King of Scotland, 370
 David Fitz Gerald, Bishop of Saint David's, 43
- De Nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii, 112, 233
Death of King Arthur, 109, 265, 382
Deeds of the Counts of Anjou, 254
Deeds of the princes of Poland, 42, 238
 Deheubarth (Wales), 215
 Delilah, biblical character, 124
 Delphine of Sabran, 220
 Demetrios, St, 239
 Denis Piramus, 127, 169, 214
 Denise of Montchensey, 64
 Denmark, 138, 203
 Desclais Berkvam, Doris, 224
 Diana the Huntress, 111
 Dido, character of *Aeneid*, 117
 Die, Countess of, *trobairitz*, 219
 diglossia, 64
 Dino Compagni, 182
 Diocletian, Roman Emperor, 239
 Diogenes Laërtius, Greek author, 78
 Dionysius Cato, 289, 313–5
 Dionysius the Areopagite, 85
 Disibodenberg (Palatinate, Germany), 189
 Dominic of Osma, St, 366
 Dominicans, 5, 299, 354
 Dompna vos m'aves et amors, 325
 Donatus, grammarian, 62
 Doon, friend of Belle Doette, 196
 Douce de Foix, Countess of Urgell, 142
 Douceline of Digne, 219
 Dronke, Peter, 27, 120, 190, 344
 dubbing, 16–8, 42, 140, 175, 180, 257–8, 260–2, 276–8, 346, 363, 365, 383, 386–7, 397–8
 Duby, Georges, 19, 58, 224, 275, 323
 Dudon of Saint-Quentin, 87
 Durmat le Gallois, 196
 Dyfed (Wales), 143
- Eadmer of Canterbury, 51, 365
 Eble II, Viscount of Ventadour, 336
 Edith-Mathilda of Scotland, Queen of England, 190, 201
 Edward I, King of England, 1, 193
 Edward the Exile, 200
 Egypt, 25, 114, 261
 Ehrismann, Gustav, 255

- Eike von Repgow, 202
 Eilhart von Oberg, 212
 Eleanor of Aquitaine, Queen of England,
 73, 118, 120, 123, 187, 196–7, 206, 209,
 333
 Eleanor of Aragon, Countess of Toulouse,
 15, 73, 118, 120, 123, 186–7, 192,
 196–7, 206, 209, 333
 Eleanor of England, daughter of John
 Lackland, 185
 Eleanor of Provence, Queen of England, 15
 Elias, Norbert, 32, 308
 Elisabeth de Vermandois, Countess of
 Flanders, 327
 Elzear of Sabran, 220
 Ely (East Anglia), 128, 215
 Emeric, King of Hongrie, 192
 Emilia (Italy), 81, 170
 Emma of Normandy, Queen of England,
 202
 Enide, Arthurian character, 84, 124, 159,
 301, 322, 332
 Entença, Catalan family of, 193
 Erec, Arthurian character, 84, 120, 124,
 130, 159, 163, 169, 301, 322, 330, 332
 Erfurt (Thuringia), 161
 Ermengarde of Anjou, Countess of
 Brittany, 364
 Ermengarde, Viscountess of Narbonne, 120
 Ermengol VII, Count of Urgell, 142
 Escalot, Arthurian character, 213
 Escavalon, 252
 Esmerée la Blonde, Arthurian character,
 159
 Estort de Mares, Arthurian character, 180
 Eteocles, Greek mythological character,
 124
 Étienne de Fougères, Bishop of Rennes,
 242
 Euclid, mathematician, 78
 Eudes de Saint-Maur-les-Fossés, 48
 Eugene III, Pope, 347
 Eugenius of Palermo, 78
 Eustorge, Bishop of Limoges, 172
 evangelistaries, 198, 200
 Eve, 200, 258, 384
 Evesham (Worcestershire, England), 88
 Évrard, Count of Breteuil-sur-Noye, 86
 Evrat, clerk, 91
 Évreux (Eure, Normandy), 127
 Excalibur, 253
 Ezekiel, prophet, 273
 Ezzelino III da Romano, 80
Facetus, 291–2, 306, 316
 falconry, 37, 39, 94, 184, 247, 304, 343
 Falkes de Bréauté, 338
 Falquet de Romans, 102, 174, 386
 Faral, Edmond, 123, 336, 347
 Felice, daughter of the Count of Warwick,
 185
 Felipa Porcelet, 219
 Fenice, Arthurian character, 186
 Ferté-en-Ponthieu (Picardy, France), 95
 Field of Blood, *Ager sanguinis* (battle at
 Sarmada or Balat, Syria), 145
 First Continuation of Perceval, 44
Flamenca, 124–5, 218, 362, 365
 Flanders, 23–4, 95, 117, 156, 191, 236,
 261, 326, 385
 Flavius Josephus, 96
 Fleur-dépine, epical character, 187–8
Floire and Blancheflor, 117, 187, 349
 Florence (Toscana, Italy), 60, 166–7, 181,
 349, 354
 Flori, Jean, 17, 255, 260, 267, 278
Floriant et Florete, 115
 Floris and Lyriope, 184, 197
 Folie Tristan, 94
 Folquet de Marseille, Bishop of Toulouse,
 319
 Fontevraud (Anjou, France), 198, 246, 336,
 369
 Forcaire, Arthurian character, 243
 Foucher of Chartres, 267
Fouke le fitz Waryn, 253
 Foulque II, Count of Anjou, 22, 253
 Foulque III Nerra, Count of Anjou, 253
 Foulque IV, Count of Anjou, 145
 Foulque V, Count of Anjou and, King of
 Jerusalem, 146
 Foulque of Neuilly, 174
 Foulque of Whittington, 253
 Francesca da Rimini, 27, 197

- Franche-Comté (France), 95, 158
 Francis of Assisi, 136, 357, 366, 372–3
 Franciscans, 5, 299, 354, 373
 Frappier, Jean, 351
 Freculphe of Lisieux, 96
 Frederick I Barbarossa, Emperor, 25, 49, 96
 Frederick II, Emperor, 102, 153, 386
 Frederick III, King of Sicile, 179
 Frederick, Count of Saxe, 161, 190
 Frederick von Hausen, 157
 Frederick of Thuringia, 140
 Frêne, protagonist of *Galeran of Brittany*, 117
 Frequenter cogitans de factis hominum, 243
 Frigus hinc est horridum, 347, 348

 Gace Brulé, 156
 Galahad, son of Joseph of Arimathea, 158, 241, 355
 Galahad, son of Lancelot, 51, 180, 241, 265–6, 381
 Galbraith, Vivian H., 8
 Galerán d'Ivry, 127
 Galerán, Count of Meulan, 117
 Gallais, Pierre, 6, 103, 143
 Gangolf (Bavaria), 248
 Garcías de Lorte, Bishop of Comminges, 379
 Garin lo Brun, 126, 281–2, 291, 293, 295, 300–1, 314, 317
 Gâtinais (Orléanais, France), 159
 Gaubert the Norman, 172
 Gaucelm Faidit, 331
 Gauffrey, 187
 Gaufredo of Viterbo, 195
 Gautier de Brienne, Count of Jaffa, 366
 Gautier de Châtillon, 384
 Gautier de Coincy, 368
 Gautier de Fontaines, 327
 Gautier de Montbéliard, 158
 Gautier de Nemours, 252
 Gautier Espec, 92
 Gautier Silen, 85
 Gawain, Arthurian, character, 85, 109, 124, 159, 164, 179, 206, 241, 252, 256, 265–6, 330
 Gellone (Languedoc, France), 39, 238
 Genoa (Liguria, Italy), 80, 166, 181
 Geoffrey Gaymar, 115, 139
 Geoffrey I Grisegonelle, Count of Anjou, 146
 Geoffrey V le Bel, Count of Anjou, 72, 395
 Geoffrey, Archbishop of York, 318
 Geoffrey, Duke of Brittany, 151
 Geoffrey of Auxerre, 208
 Geoffrey of Monmouth, 72, 92–3, 115, 138, 157, 188, 208, 307, 329, 331, 378
 Geoffrey of Reims, 111
 Geoffrey of Vigeois, 141, 172, 296
 Geoffroi de Villehardouin, 156, 173–4
 George, St, 26, 77
 Gepa, Countess of Naumburg, 198
 Gerald of Riechenberg, 96
 Gerald of Wales, 24–5, 43, 68, 73, 75, 82, 128, 142, 236, 248–9, 288, 361, 375, 384, 395
 Géraud, chaplain of Hugh of Avranches, 360
 Gerbert de Montreuil, 374
 Gerbert of Metz, 222
 Gerburg, Countess of Naumburg, 198
 Germain of Auxerre, St, 362
 Gervase of Tilbury, 57, 145, 154–5
 Gilbert de Garlande, 210
 Gilbert Fitz Baderon, 91
 Gilbert Foliot, Bishop of Londres, 72, 83, 84, 358
 Gilbert Marshal, 57
 Gilbert of Mons, 49, 327
 Giles of Rome, 65, 194
 Giovanni Villani, 60, 182
 Girardo Cagapisto, 78
 Girbea, Catalina, 18, 22, 88, 109, 114, 161, 241, 266, 351, 376
 Giroie de Montreuil, 55
 Gisors (Normandy, France), 70–1
 Glamorgan (Wales, Britain), 68
 glossary, 45
 Gloucester (England), 83, 115, 284, 358
 Godfrey of Saint Victor, 30
 Goliath, biblical character, 124
 Gontier de Soignies, 205
 Goody, Jack, 8, 9
 Gorgon, character of Greek mythology, 111

- Gormond, epical character, 75
 Gormonda de Montpellier, 218
 Gornemant de Goort, Arthurian character, 365
 Goswin de Bossut, 198
 Gottfried von Strassburg, 164–5, 185, 213, 283, 304, 318
 Gouffier de Lastours, 172
 Granada (Andalusia, Spain), 170
 Granet, juggler, 133
 Gratian, 14, 392
 Greece, 25, 76, 110, 173, 343, 345, 395
 Green, Dennis H., 27, 115, 184, 200, 206, 216–7, 224
 Grégoire Bechada, 172
 Gregory the Great, Pope, 15, 284, 384
 Gregory VII, Pope, 259
 Guerau IV of Cabrera, Viscount of Gerone, 137
 Guernes de Pont-Sainte-Maxence, 21
 Guerreau-Jalabert, Anita, 275, 380
 Gui d'Idelin, 361
 Gui d'Ussel, 333
 Gui de Cabannes, 132–3
 Gui de Cavaillon, 151–3, 349, 393
 Gui de Châtillon-sur-Marne, 338
 Gui de Dampierre, Count of Flanders, 95
 Gui de Montfort, Count of Nola, 88
 Gui de Thourotte, 156
 Guibert of Nogent, 47, 171
 Guido of Basinello, 81
 Guigues-Dauphin IV, Count of Viennois, 199
 Guilhem Ademar, 324
 Guilhem de Cabestany, 148, 327–8
 Guilhem de Latour, 207
 Guilhem Figueira, 218
 Guilhem de Nemours, 365
 Guilhem Porcelet, Bishop of Digne, 219
 Guilhem Porcelet, lord of Fos, 219
 Guilhem de Tudèle, 131
 Guilhema of Melgueil, Viscountess of Cardona, 207
 Guillaume, canon of Grenoble, 199, 293
 Guillaume aux Blanches Mains, Archbishop of Reims, 57
 Guillaume de Barres, 160
 Guillaume d'Hautpol, 275
 Guillaume de Lorris, 155, 303, 314, 321
 Guillaume de Nangis, 26
 Guillaume de Rennes, 379
 Guillaume de Saint-Pair, 14
 Guillaume de Saint-Pathus, 311
 Guillaume de Saint-Thierry, 205, 255, 296, 340
 Guillaume de Tournai, 63, 357, 369–70
 Guillaume le Clerc, 19
 Guillaume le Gros, Viscount of Marseilles, 141
 Guillaume Mita, 142
 Guillem de Montcada, 108
 Guiluys de Boisleux, 204
 Guinevere, wife of King Arthur, 27, 91, 109, 113, 197, 206, 213, 250, 256, 265, 376
 Guiot de Provins, 140, 262
 Guiraut de Bornelh, 148
 Guiraut de Calanson, 352
 Guiraut Riquier, 129, 352
 Guy of Warwick, 185
 Gwenllïan, princess of Gwynedd, 215
 Haakon IV, King of Norway, 168
 Hadewich, 221
 Hainaut (Flanders), 49, 95, 204–5, 221, 319
 Hamesse, Jacqueline, 6
 Hampshire (England), 92
 Hariulf, abbot of Oudenbourg, 245, 338
 Hartmann von Aue, 108, 120, 157, 163, 165, 171, 272, 322, 330, 355, 393
 Hasard of Aldehem, 85
 Hastings (Sussex, England), 139
 Hattin (Galilee), 151, 269
 Hautefort (Périgord, France), 151
 Hawise de Giroie, 202
 Hebrew, 12, 40, 187, 210, 365
 Hector, hero of Greek mythology, 124
 Heinrich of Schwarzburg, 116
 Heinrich Raspe, 116
 Heinrich von dem Türlin, 22
 Heinrich von Ouwe, 163
 Heldris of Cornwall, 106
 Helen, hero of Greek mythology, 346, 349
 Hélié de Boron, 160

- Hélinand de Froidmont, 256, 260
 Hellequin, *mesnie*, 89, 244
 Helmsley (Yorkshire, England), 92
 Heloise, wife of Peter Abelard, 27
 Hendrik van Veldeke, 116, 131, 140
 Hengist, Saxon King, 307
 Henry III, Emperor, 59
 Henry IV, Emperor, 259
 Henry VI, Emperor, 49, 151, 156, 195
 Henry I, King of England, 23, 49, 64, 69–70, 83, 92–3, 111, 116, 224, 248, 261, 264, 298, 310
 Henry II, King of England, 21, 25, 33, 49, 50, 57, 59, 71, 74, 76, 84, 89–90, 118, 123, 127, 145, 151, 160, 214, 249, 253, 286–7, 291, 299, 303, 310–1, 318, 346, 360, 367, 375
 Henry III, King of England, 88, 145, 199, 251, 284
 Henry the Young, King of England, 57, 151, 303, 310
 Henry I of Lusignan, King of Cyprus, 175
 Henry, Count of Champagne, 24
 Henry, Count of Salm-en-Vosges, 118
 Henry the Lion, Duke of Saxe and Bavaria, 49, 96, 140, 141, 203
 Henry, Bishop of Strasbourg, 141
 Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, 84
 Henry Aristippe, archdeacon of Catana, 77
 Henry of Huntingdon, 50, 69
 Henry of Montfort, 151, 164
 Henry of Saltrey, 377
 Herbert of Bosham, 286–7, 299, 310, 312
 heresy, 75, 334–5, 356, 381
 Heriman, abbot of Saint-Martin of Tournai, 245
 Hermann I, landgrave of Thuringe, 161
 Hermann of Thuringia, 116
 Hermeline la Renarde, fictional character, 123
 Hermogène de Puglia, 46
 Herode, King, 246
 Herrad, abbess of Hohenburg, 190
 Hesione, Greek mythological character, 346
 Hildebert of Lavardin, Bishop du Mans, 42, 111, 336
 Hildegard of Bingen, 189, 196, 206, 217, 387
 Hildesheim (Saxe), 198
 Hippolytus, St, 239
 History of Selby Abbey, 362
 History of the Pilgrims, 141
 History of the Welfs, 48
 Hohenems (Vorarlberg, Austria), 164
 Homer, 24, 154, 286
 Honorius Augustodunensis, 14, 135, 242
 Horace, 3, 210, 288
 Horncastle (Lincolnshire, England), 64
 Hospitallers, 274, 354
 Hue de Rotelande, 46, 91
 Huesca (Aragon, Spain), 192
 Hugh, Bishop of Auxerre, 42
 Hugh III, Duke of Bourgogne, 127
 Hugh of Avalon, Bishop of Lincoln, 246
 Hugh of Chester, 49
 Hugh of Fleury, 111
 Hugh of Mandeville, 49
 Hugh Nonant, Bishop of Coventry, 128
 Hugh of Saint Victor, 290, 307, 314, 339
 Hugh of Semur, abbot of Cluny, 42
 Hugo Falcandus, 78
 Hugo von Trimberg, 248, 307
 Hugues, Bishop of Auxerre, 353
 Hugues de Berzé, 174
 Hugues de Brienne, 174
 Hugues de Claye, 145
 Hugues de Digne, 205, 219
 Hugues de Fouilloy, 353–4, 392
 Hugues de Tibériade, 262, 363
 Humbert de Romans, 243
Hunbaut, 103, 113
 Hungary, 192, 315
 hunting, 106, 109, 127, 247, 249, 251, 253, 272, 303, 305, 326, 344, 353, 358
 Huon de Bordeaux, 305
 Huon de Méry, 131
 Husbandry, 66
 Hyères (Provence, France), 219
 Ibelins, Lords of Beirut, 174–5
 Icarus, character of the Greek mythology, 124, 358
 Iceland, 119, 168

- Ida of Nivelles, 198
 Ilger Bigod, 51
 Imbert d'Eyguières, Archbishop of Arles, 57
 Innocent III, Pope, 55, 89, 293
 Innocent IV, Pope, 365, 382
 Isaac de l'Étoile, 271, 391
 Isabella de Forz, 66
 Isarn Porcelet, 219, 245
 Iseult, 109, 185, 212–3, 216, 326, 332
 Isidore, Bishop of Seville, 24, 258
 Ivo, Bishop of Chartres, 111
Iwein, 108, 163, 169

 Jacobus de Cessolis, 252
 Jacobus de Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa, 184
 Jacques Bretel, 118–20
 Jacques de Vitry, Bishop of Acre, 246, 249, 271, 297
 Jaeger, C. Stephen, 31–3, 50, 255, 283, 284, 287, 315, 326, 337, 344
 James I, King of Aragon, 65, 178–80
 James II, King of Aragon, 179
 James II, King of Majorca, 65
 Jane of Mountchesney, 185
 Jarnègues île entre Tarascon and Beaucaire, 141
 Jason, character of the Greek mythology, 124
 Jaufre Rudel, prince of Blaye, 149, 327, 336
 Jean d'Avesnes, Count of Hainaut, 95
 Jean Bodel, 169
 Jean of Brabant, 114
 Jean d'Ibelin, 175
 Jean de Limoges, 315
 Jean de Meung, 37, 107, 387
 Jean de Nanteuil, 88
 Jean de Neuville-Vitasse, 204
 Jean de Pequigni, 95
 Jean de Saint-Pierre, 207
 Jean le Trouvère, 155, 330
 Jean Renart, 20, 117, 159
 Jeanne de Montbaston, 222
 Jeanne, Countess of Toulouse, 88
 Jerome, St, 12, 53, 135, 166, 193
 Jersey (Anglo-Norman Island), 21
 Jerusalem (Holy Land), 69, 84, 91, 140, 146, 158–9, 174, 266, 268, 270–1, 273, 311, 372, 378
 jester, 132–3
 Joachim of Flora, 205
 Job, biblical character, 118, 376, 387
 John de Warenne, 1–2
 John I, King of England, 73, 76, 82, 185, 338
 John of Damascus, 165
 John of Garland, 291, 306, 315
 John of Marmoutier, 96, 146, 261, 395
 John of Salisbury, 7, 15–6, 18, 30, 47, 54, 61, 68, 71, 76, 108, 155, 169, 236, 247, 254–6, 258, 278, 288, 312, 346, 357, 364, 384, 399
 John the Baptist, St, 255
 John the Evangelist, St, 369
 John XXII, Pope, 250, 373
 Joigny (Burgundy, France), 155
 Joinville, Jean de, 95, 113–4, 176, 240, 252, 294, 302, 305, 355–6, 359, 361, 366, 387
 Jón Loftsson, 168
 Jón Ögmundsson, Bishop of Iceland, 119
 jongleurs, 68, 124–44, 147, 155–6, 173, 381, 392, 396
 Joseph of Arimathea, 158, 241, 355
 Joseph, patriarch, 315
 Judas Maccabeus, 124
 Judith of Thuringia, Queen of Bohemia, 195
 Julius Caesar, Emperor, 25, 76, 124
 Jupiter, Roman god, 249
 Jutta of Sponheim, 189
 Juvenal, Roman author, 346, 384

 Kaeuper, Richard W., 250, 277, 368, 375, 378, 380
 Kahedin, Arthurian character, 213
 Kaiserchronik, 295
 Kaiserwerth (Westphalia, Germany), 49
 Keu, Arthurian character, 114
 Knight with Two Swords, 85, 196
 Köhler, Erich, 149
 Kyot the Provençal, 162

- Lambert d'Ardres, 131, 191, 249
 Lambert the Stammer, 220
 Lancelot du Lac, Arthurian character, 130
 Lanfranc, Archbishop of Canterbury, 50, 59, 70
 Lanval, Arthurian character, 215
 Laon (Picardy, France), 245
 Lastours (Limousin, France), 172
latimer, 46, 143
 Latran (Rome, Italy), 360
 Laudine, Arthurian character, 108, 204, 332
 Laurent, archdeacon of Poitiers, 212
 Laurent, Dominican brother, 66, 270
lauzangier, 148, 325
 Lavinia, character of the Roman mythology, 124
 Layamon, 308
 Le Goff, Jacques, 28, 312, 370, 373
 Leicester, Countess of, 69, 71, 73, 87, 184, 204, 358
 Léodegan, Arthurian character, 257
 Leopold V, Duke of Austria, 140
 Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 9
 Lewis, C.S., 333
 library, 45, 85, 90–2, 95, 96, 124, 177, 192, 199, 202, 226, 347
Libro de Alexandre, 41
 Liège (Flanders), 220, 343
Life of the Desert Fathers, 169
Life of Saint Marguerite of Antioch, 116
Life of Saint Martin, 95
 Lincolnshire (England), 64, 92
 Linhaure, fictional character, 351
 Lisbon (Portugal), 73, 380
 Livy, Roman historian, 96
 Lizana, Aragonese family, 193
 Lobrichon, Guy, 27, 198, 211, 220, 342, 356
 Lodi (Lombardy, Italy), 80, 195
 Logres, Arthurian town, 382
 Lombardy (Italy), 59, 80, 174–5, 386
 Lough Derg (Shannon, Ireland), 377
 Louis the Pious, Emperor, 75
 Louis IV, King of France, 22
 Louis VI, King of France, 52, 264
 Louis VII, King of France, 49, 127, 210, 311
 Louis VIII, King of France, 76, 152
 Louis IX, King of France saint, 26, 113, 159, 176–7, 231, 240, 252, 273, 294, 302, 305, 312, 356, 359, 362, 369–70, 372, 399
 Love Poems of Regensburg, 343
 Luce del Gat, Arthurian character, 160
 Ludie, character of *Gerbert of Metz*, 222
 Ludwig III, Count of Thuringia, 116, 140
 Lund (Denmark), 283
 Lunette, Arthurian character, 124
 Mabel of Bellême, 244
 Mâcon (Burgundy, France), 58, 159
 Macrobius, Roman author, 110
 magic, 54, 113, 126, 154, 185–6, 188, 215, 247
magister, 46, 55, 57, 185, 189
magistra, 189, 233
 Mahaut, Countess of Artois, 95
 Mailolin, jongleur, 132
 Mainier, abbot of Saint-Victor of Marseilles, 95
 Mainz (Palatinate), 116, 140–1, 309
 Maione of Bari, 354
 Majorca (Balears), 64, 108, 178–80, 266
 Mal-au-corps, jongleur, 134
 Malcolm III, King of Ecosse, 200, 202
 Male-nuit, jongleur, 134
 Maragde Porcelet, 220
 Marbode, Bishop of Rennes, 336, 340
 Marcabru, troubadour, 137, 328, 336
 Marcia, mythical Queen of Britain, 208
 Marco Polo, 166, 181
 Margaret Biset, 199
 Margaret of England, Queen of Scotland, 200
 Margaret of Provence, Queen of France, 193
 Margaret Porete, 221
 Marguerite de Cleves, 116
 Marguerite de Rivers, 338
 Marianus Scotus, 203
 Marie de France, author, 107, 110, 188, 214, 216–8, 222, 322, 330, 344, 377, 393
 Marie de Montpellier, Queen of Aragon, 209
 Marie de Rethel, Countess of Brienne, 204

- Marie de Ventadour, 331
 Marie of France, Countess of Champagne, 115, 120
 Mark, Arthurian character, 212, 284, 304, 318, 326
 Marlborough (Wiltshire, England), 318
 Marmoutier (Tours, France), 22–3, 56, 366
 Marrou, Henri-Irénée, 334
 Mars, Roman god, 23, 42, 233
 Marseilles (Provence, France), 15, 141, 180, 219
 Martial, St, 59
 Martianus Capella, Roman author, 112
 Martin of Tours, St, 245
 Martin, Archbishop of Braga, 289
 Martino da Canal, 181
 Mary Magdalene, St, 375
 Mary of Brabant, Queen of France, 217
 Mary, St, 51, 62, 90, 107, 156, 160, 184, 200, 217, 245, 331, 341, 366, 368, 375
 Mathilda of Flanders, Queen of England, 29
 Mathilde of Anjou, sister of Geoffrey le Bel, 185
 Matilda of England, Empress, 23, 83, 261
 Matthew de Ludun, Bishop of Angers, 185
 Matthew Paris, 15, 26, 57, 185, 187, 199, 226, 311, 338
 Maurice, St, 68
 Maurice, brother of the abbot of Neath, 68
 Maurice, half brother of the Count of Anjou, 254
 Maurice de Sully, Bishop of Paris, 166, 297
 Mechtilde of Magdeburg, 221
 medicine, 41, 54, 56, 58, 61, 63, 112, 187, 188, 193, 307, 375
 Melfi (Basilicata, Italy), 79, 386
 Melias, Arthurian character, 265
 Melior, fictional character, 187
 Meloria (Liguria, Italy), 166
 Mercia (Anglo-Saxon realm), 209
 Merlin the Wizard, 71, 124, 143, 158, 159, 188, 241, 250, 257, 355
 Messinopolis (Mosynopolis, Thrace, Greece), 173
 Michael, St, 365
 Milan (Lombardy, Italy), 80, 200, 315
Milon, 215–7
 Minerva, Roma goddess, 191
Minnesänger, 155–6, 161–2, 182, 195, 321, 325, 350, 393
 Miroir du monde, 66
 Mirota d'Unaud de Lanta, 207
 Modena (Emilia-Romagna, Italy), 170
 Monfalcone (Emilia-Romagna, Italy), 81
 Monfrin, Jacques, 176
 Moniage Guillaume, 272
 Montauban (Languedoc, France), 131
 Montaudon, troubadour, 137
 Montauriol (Languedoc, France), 207
 Montbrun, fictional town, 329
 Montcada, Catalan family, 108, 193, 207
 Monte Cassino (Latium, Italy), 78
 Montfort (Vorarlberg Austria), 87–8, 134, 191
 Montpellier (Languedoc, France), 209, 231, 242
 Montreuil-Bellay (Anjou, France), 23, 395
 Mont-Saint-Michel (Normandy, France), 14, 244
 Morat de Gaunes, Arthurian character, 180
 Morgan, Arthurian character, 109, 188, 204
 Morris, Colin, 234, 334
 Morrois, Arthurian forest, 326
 Moses, patriarch, 261
 Murcia (Levante, Spain), 181
 Muret (Languedoc, France), 191, 379
 Muriel, nun of Wilton, 190
 musical instruments, 107, 118, 122, 125, 144, 154, 170
 Nantes (Brittany, France), 44, 84
 Naples (Campania, Italy), 78–9, 153, 178–80
 Narcissus, character of the Greek mythology, 124, 149
 Nathan, prophet, 357
 Naumburg (Saxe, Germany), 198
 Navas de Tolosa (Andalusia, Spain), 266, 327
 Neopatria (Greece), 178
 Nestor, character of the Greek mythology, 24, 69
 Nominale sive verbale, 45

- Normandy, 14, 19, 21, 50, 59, 70, 76, 87, 111, 115, 127, 223, 310
 Norway, 168, 304
Novellino, 135, 303
 Nuneaton (Warwickshire, England), 359
 Nuremberg (Bavaria), 161, 309
nutritus, 46

 Oberto de Orto, 78
 Oddi (Iceland), 168
 Ogier the Dane, 298
 Ogrin, Arthurian character, 212, 326
 Olivier, epical hero, 139, 179
 Ong, Walter J., 9, 11
 Onulf von Speyer, 283
 Opo of Seeland, 283
 orality, 8, 10–2, 176, 216, 393, 394
 Orange (Provence, France), 129, 154, 161, 171, 239, 272
 Orderic Vital, 29, 49, 54–5, 58–9, 137, 202, 239, 242, 244, 264, 298
 Orpheus, character of the Greek mythology, 124
 Otheur d'Avranches, 49
 Otranto (Puglia, Italy), 170
 Otto I the Great, Emperor, 31
 Otto IV, Emperor, 57
 Otto of Freising, 25, 96, 270
 Ottokar of Styria, 309
 Ottone Morena, 80
 Ovid, Roman author, 3, 63, 110–1, 119, 164, 197, 210, 216, 291, 305, 321, 324, 336, 338, 347–8
 Owein, fictional Irish knight, 377
 Oxford (England), 8, 18, 31, 61, 72, 94, 184, 200, 204, 271, 284

 Painter, Sidney, 334
 Palamede, Arthurian character, 180
 Paraclet (Burgundy, France), 210–1
 Paris (France), 7, 20, 21, 25, 26, 40–1, 43, 45, 47, 54–5, 61, 76, 89, 110, 120, 124, 152, 166, 169, 174, 199, 210, 217, 221–2, 297, 299, 345, 349, 351, 370
 Paris, character of the Greek mythology, 120, 124
 Parma (Emilia-Romagna, Italy), 107
 Patrick, St, 214, 377
 patristics, 4, 11, 211, 352
 Paul, abbot of Sat Albans, 226
 Paul, St, 220–1, 258, 340
 Paulin Piper, 26, 77, 145
 Pedro Pascual, Bishop of Jaen, 170
 Peire Duran de Carpentras, 127
 Pelrapeire, Arthurian castle, 161
 Pembroke (Wales, Britain), 57
 Peralada de l'Empordà (Catalonia, Spain), 178
 Perceforest, Arthurian character, 319
 Perceval, Arthurian character, 18, 84, 124, 143, 158, 180, 204, 241, 251, 264, 301, 374
 Perdigon, troubadour, 385
 Pere Berenguer, sacristan of the cathedral of Vic, 207
Perlesvaus, 84, 109, 243, 244, 376
 Peter, St, 54, 190, 201, 203, 268, 375
 Peter II, King of Aragon, 191–2, 209
 Peter III, King of Aragon, 177–81, 192
 Peter IV, King of Aragon, 181
 Peter Abelard, 4, 27, 44, 53, 55, 57, 210, 290, 307, 315, 342, 358
 Peter Alfonsi, 37
 Peter of Blois, 89, 129, 209, 212, 276, 288, 341, 346, 367
 Peter the Chanter, 89, 124, 136, 257, 384
 Peter Comestor, 356
 Peter Damian, 12
 Peter of Puglia, 205
 Peter the Venerable, 210, 222, 234, 271
 Petrarch, 97
 Petrucci, Armando, 10
 Philip of Swabia, Emperor, 161
 Philip, King of Macedonia, 343
 Philip II Augustus, King of France, 76, 152, 160, 203
 Philip III, King of France, 66, 114, 192, 217, 295
 Philip IV, King of France, 65, 176, 275, 295
 Philip I, Count of Flanders, 86
 Philippe of Heinsberg, Archbishop of Cologne, 140
 Philip of Harvengt, 16, 23

- Philip of Novara, 18, 174, 194, 224, 237, 251, 282, 303, 363, 385
- Philippe d'Harcourt, Bishop of Bayeux, 94
- Philippe de Beaumanoir, 160, 359
- Philippe de Remy, Lord of Beaumanoir, 159
- Phyllis and Flore, 336
- Picardy (France), 86, 95, 173, 196, 325
- Pierre d'Amiens, 172
- Pierre Dubois, 193, 194, 224
- Pierre de Limoges, 297
- Pierre des Vaux-de-Cernay, 134, 261, 379
- Pietro da Barsegapé, 354
- Pietro Crescenzi, 66
- Pietro della Vigna, 79
- Pilate, 158–9
- Pilorse, Arthurian character, 212
- Pippin the Short, King of the Franks, 76
- Pirenne, Henri, 8
- Pisa (Toscana, Italy), 80, 107, 181
- Plato, 3, 23, 78, 110, 154, 169, 233, 255, 284, 286, 337, 359
- Poincet le Blaireau, 123
- Poitiers (Poitou, France), 105, 143, 212, 336
- Poitou (France), 143, 146, 160, 318, 336, 343
- Polovtseians (Cumans), 225
- Polynices, character of the Greek mythology, 124
- Porphyry, 286
- preaching, predication, 5, 11, 136, 141, 154, 170, 174, 186, 222, 224, 234, 240, 275, 280, 290, 299, 312, 336, 354, 371, 373, 398
- preceptor, 46, 165, 185, 195, 309–10, 319, 392, 395
- Priam, character of the Greek mythology, 124, 346
- Priscian, Latin grammarian, 3, 62, 216
- Provence (France), 2, 57, 58, 88, 103, 132, 141, 153, 205, 245
- psalter, 45, 186, 189, 195, 197–9, 202–4, 206, 216, 220, 225–7, 343, 355, 362, 365
- Ptolemy, Greek astronomer, 78
- Pythagoras, Greek philosopher, 236
- quadrivium*, 13, 37, 54, 58, 63, 112, 185, 188–9, 210, 392
- Quedlinburg (Saxe, Germany), 190
- Queste del Saint Graal, 265
- Quintilian, Roman rhetorician, 3, 232, 337
- Quintus Curtius Rufus, 40
- Quisquis es in mensa*, 291, 306, 309, 313
- Rabanus Maurus, 25
- Raimbaut de Vaqueiras, 137
- Raimbaut, troubadour, 349
- Raimon de Planel, 132
- Raimon Jaufre, general minister of the Franciscans, 219
- Raimond V, Count of Toulouse, 134, 152, 375
- Raimond VI, Count of Toulouse, 134, 152, 375
- Raimond VII, Count of Toulouse, 152
- Raimond Berenguer III, Count of Provence, 58
- Raimond Berenguer V, Count of Provence, 132, 152
- Raimond d'Agoult, 141
- Raimond d'Amboise, 130, 254
- Raimond de Château-Roussillon, 148, 327
- Rainaud Porcelet, 220
- Rainier, knight, 353
- Ralph Glaber, 59
- Ralph Niger, 273
- Ramon Muntaner, 178–80
- Ramon Vidal de Besalu, 289, 294, 300, 385
- Ramsey (Cambridgeshire, England), 52
- Ranulph of Glanville, 73–5
- Raoul de Cambrai, 75, 305
- Raoul de Hodenc, 281
- Raoul de Montreuil, 55
- Raoul de Nesle, 95
- Raoul Fitz Gilbert, 92, 115
- Ravenna (Emilia-Romagna), 167, 259
- Raymond de Baffignac, 74, 75
- Raymond Lull, 18, 63–5, 170, 246, 258, 262–3, 274, 398
- Raymond of Poitiers, prince of Antioch, 82

- Reginald de Chartres, 207
 Reims (Champagne, France), 300, 381
 Reiner the German, 291
 Reinfried von Braunschweig, 274
 Reinmar von Hagenau, 325
 Reinmar von Zweter, 222
 Remiremont (Alsace, France), 347–8
 Renaud de Bâgé, 115, 159
 Renaud de Montauban, 223
 Rhys ap Gruffydd, 215
 Ricau Bonomel, 273
 Riccardo da San Germano, 78
 Richard, illegitimate son of Henry I, 49, 189
 Richard Animal, 187
 Richard I, Duke of Normandie, 87, 127
 Richard of Bury, Bishop of Durham, 83
 Richard Fitz Nigel, Bishop of Londres, 72
 Richard Marshal, Lord of Longueville, 77
 Richard of Poitiers, 118
 Rievaulx (Yorkshire, England), 53, 92, 370
 Rigord, 130, 135
 Rivalin, Arthurian character, 283
 Robert, brother, translator, 213
 Robert, Count of Leicester, 73
 Robert, Count of Meulan, 69, 71
 Robert of Artois, 159
 Robert d'Arbrissel, 336, 341, 364
 Robert de Bellême, 244
 Robert de Béthune, Count of Flanders, 95
 Robert Bloet, Bishop of Lincoln, 49
 Robert de Blois, 184, 197, 293, 300–1, 306, 314, 316, 363
 Robert de Boron, 71, 158–61, 171, 188, 241, 355, 362
 Robert de Clari, 56, 172, 173, 174
 Robert de Courson, 89, 242, 399
 Robert Grosseteste, Bishop of Lincoln, 284, 291
 Robert II de Grandmesnil, 202
 Robert of Gloucester, 92, 115, 138
 Robert of Hatfield, 225
 Robert de Sorbon, 294, 313, 387
 Robert the Strong, Count of Paris, 146
 Robert de Torigni, 94
 Rock of the Port of Peril, Arthurian castle, 243
 Rodenegg (south Tyrol, Italy), 108
 Roffredo de Benevento, 78
 Roger Bacon, 31, 61, 136
 Roger Bernard III, Count of Foix, 192
 Roger de Flor, 178, 179, 180
 Roger II, King of Sicile, 77
 Roger le Poer, Bishop of Salisbury, 360
 Roger of Howden, 128, 326
 Roger of Montgommery, 54
 Roger of Wendover, 77
 Roland, epical hero, 39, 139, 154, 171, 179, 298
 Rolandino of Padua, 80
Roman des sept sages de Rome, 94
 Romance of Renart, 175
Romance of Thebes, 19–21, 110, 157
 Romany (Balkans), 173, 179
 Rome (Latium, Italy), 12, 25, 29, 46, 59, 65, 140, 173, 218, 232, 395
 Romsey (Hampshire, England), 190, 201
 Ronwena, daughter of Saxon King, 307
 Roscelin of Compiègne, 53
 Roussel, Claude, 289, 308, 318, 351
 Royaumont (Ile-de-France), 312
 Rudolf von Ems, 40, 164–5, 171, 324, 355
 Rupertsberg (Palatinate, Germany), 189, 387
 Rusticello da Pisa, 88, 166, 181
 Rutebeuf, 250, 272
 Saint Evroult (Normandy, France), 202
 Saint Pierre de Bourgueil (Touraine, France), 111
 Saint-Denis (Ile-de-France), 26, 52, 130
 Sainte-Foy (Rouergue, France), 246
 Saint-Gilles (Languedoc, Provence), 42, 142
 Saint-Médard de Soissons (Picardy, France), 368
 Saint-Trivier (Burgundy, France), 159
 Saint-Victor (Marseilles), 94
 Saint-Victor (Paris), 55
 Saint-Vorles (Burgundy, France), 54
 Saladin, 262, 273, 297, 363
 Salerno (Campania, Italy), 56, 60, 78, 188
 Salimbene d'Adam, 81

- Salisbury (Wiltshire, England), 47, 57, 160, 247, 288, 312, 339, 360
- Salomon, biblical King, 64
- Samson de Nanteuil, 64
- Samson, biblical character, 64
- Sancha of Castile, Queen of Aragon, 191
- Sancho IV, King of Castile, 66
- Santiago de Compostella (Galicia, Spain), 170
- Saragossa (Aragon, Spain), 162
- Sardinia (Italy), 179
- Saxo (Germany), 283
- Saxo Grammaticus, 283
- Scaglione, Aldo, 32, 102, 332
- Schmalkalden (Thuringia, Italy), 108
- Schmitt, Jean-Claude, 136–7, 285
- Schnell, Rüdiger, 149, 290, 324, 326, 350
- scholasticism, 28, 70, 226
- scriptorium*, 222, 226
- scriptura continua*, 6
- seal, 88, 213, 216, 383
- Sebastian, St, 239
- Secret of secrets*, 40
- Seneca, Roman author, 3, 30, 63, 89, 210, 233, 255, 284, 289
- Seneschaucy, 66
- Sepulchre, Holy, 268, 270
- Serenus, Bishop of Marseilles, 15
- sermons *ad status*, 232, 398
- Shrewsbury (Shropshire, England), 54
- Sibille of Anjou, 185
- Sicily (Italy), 25, 57, 77–8, 81, 102, 153, 178–80, 192, 266, 354, 373, 386
- Sigena (Aragon, Spain), 191–2
- Simon I, Duke of Lorraine, 208
- Simon IV of Montfort, 151, 164
- Simon Le Bret, 360
- Simon the Young, son of Simon V of Montfort, 151, 164
- Simon V of Montfort, 151, 164
- sirventes*, 2, 127, 128, 132, 147, 150–2, 218, 273, 393
- Sirward, 54
- Skuli, Norwegian prince, 168
- Snorri Sturluson, 168–9
- Socrates, Greek philosopher, 23, 312
- Solinus, Roman author, 85
- Song of Antioch*, 124, 131, 172
- Song of Gerard of Roussillon, 187
- Soredamour, Arthurian character, 332
- Springiersbach (Palatinate, Germany), 189
- squire, 44, 64, 162, 262, 289, 294, 301, 326–7, 343, 365
- St Albans (Hertfordshire, England), 225
- St David's (Wales, Britain), 76
- St Edmond (East Anglia), 73, 127, 169, 214
- St John of Acre (Palestine), 73, 246, 266, 271, 355
- State of Alsace, 104
- Statius, Roman author, 63, 157
- Stephen I, Count of Varais, 111, 199
- Stephen of Blois, King of England, 71, 73, 84, 116
- Stephen II, Count of Blois and Chartres, 111
- Stephen Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, 7, 76, 136
- Stephen of Bourbon, 231, 271, 297, 384
- Stephen of Limburg an der Hardt, 37
- Stephen of Rouen, 23, 72
- Stephen of Tournai, 136
- Stock, Brian, 11
- stoicism, 24
- Stricker, German author, 329
- Suffolk (England), 73, 291
- Suger, abbot of Saint-Denis, 52
- tablet, 6, 62, 187, 217, 222, 239
- Taddeo of Pisa, 166
- Tagliacozzo (Abruzzi, Italy), 180
- Taillefer, 139
- Tale of Floire and Blanchefleur, 158
- Tarascon (Provence, France), 141
- Tart (Burgundy), 208
- Telamon of Salamis, 346
- Templars, 271–2, 274, 298, 354
- Tenxwind of Andernach, 387
- Tertullian, 297
- Thales of Miletus, Greek philosopher, 85
- Thebes, legion of, 19–21, 154, 184
- Theobald IV, Count of Blois et of Champagne, 372
- Theodore, St, 239

- Thessala, Arthurian character, 186
 Thibaud I, Count of Champagne, 156
 Thierry of Leernes, abbot of Saint-Hubert, 45
 Tholomeu, fictional preceptor, 46
 Thomas Aquinas, 136, 221, 256, 288, 365
 Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, 21, 50, 76, 90, 105, 261, 286–8, 299, 310–2, 359, 384, 395
 Thomas de Cantimpré, 186, 367, 377
 Thomas of Britain, author of *Tristan*, 142, 213
 Thomas of Chobham, 340
 Thomas of Kent, 236
 Thomas Walsingham, 225
 Thomas, author of *Romance of Horn*, 155
 Thomasin von Zerclaere, 19, 170, 194, 240, 385
 Thompson, James W., 8, 111, 191, 195
 Thuringia (Germany), 108, 114, 116, 140, 161–2, 291
 Timaeus of Locri, Greek philosopher, 312
 Tintagel (Cornwall, England), 124
 Toledo (Castile, Spain), 41, 185, 266
 Toscana (Italy), 166
 Toul (Lorraine, France), 348
 Toulouse (Languedoc, France), 134, 141, 147, 152, 153, 192, 238, 240, 261, 350, 375
 Touraine (France), 56, 288, 336
 tournament, 57, 84, 118, 125, 131, 155, 175, 249, 251, 261, 323, 330, 368, 388
 Tours (Touraine, France), 22, 53, 130, 146
 Tourtour (Provence, France), 245
Translatio imperii et studii, 25, 26
 translation, 12, 14, 15, 23, 25, 45, 64, 82, 88, 91, 116, 145, 157, 166, 209, 212–3, 220, 290, 327, 355, 359
 Treurizent, Arthurian character, 204
 Treviso (Veneto, Italy), 80
 Trier (Palatinate, Germany), 56, 189, 347
 Tripoli (Lebanon), 149
Tristan in prose, 160–1, 213
 Tristan, Arthurian character, 88, 109, 124, 138, 142, 155, 160–1, 164–6, 179, 185, 212–3, 216, 251, 283, 304–5, 318, 326, 351
trivium, 13, 19, 37, 54, 58, 62, 112, 188, 233, 392
trobairitz, 218, 344, 393
 Troilus, 345
 Trotula, doctor, 56, 188
 Troy (Anatolia, Turkey), 117, 154, 157, 288, 345
 Troyes (Champagne, France), 173, 236, 265
 Tunis (Tunisia), 273
 Turc de Meyronne, 219
 Turgot of Durham, Bishop of St Andrews, 190
 Tyrol, 108
 Ugolino Gosia, 60, 78
 Ulpian, Roman jurist, 384
 Ulrich von Etzenbach, 329
 Ulrich von Liechtenstein, 344
 Ulysses, character of the Greek mythology, 24, 69, 124, 139
 university, 60–1, 78, 219, 355, 384, 14, 60, 78, 355, 383
 Urban II Pope, 84, 267, 268–9, 338
 Urrea, Aragonese family, 193
 Uther Pendragon, Arthurian character, 188
 Valencia (Spain), 177–9, 219, 266
 Valerius Maximus, Roman historian, 96
 Valladolid (Castile, Spain), 295
 Valnègre (Foix, France), 191
 Vauchez, André, 5, 276, 280, 357, 374
 Vegetius *strategie romain*, 23, 37, 96, 346, 395
 Vence (AlpesMaritimes), 58
 Venice (Venetie), 181
 Ventadour (Correze), 142, 325, 331, 336
 Venus, Roman goddess, 107, 110, 197, 321, 336, 347, 348
 Verger, Jacques, 3, 28, 54, 55, 383
 Veronica, 159
 Veurne, dame of, 245
 Victor, St, 95, 239, 245
 Vienna (Austria), 251
 Villers-en-Brabant (Flanders), 53
 Vincennes (Val-de-Marne, France), 176
 Vincent de Beauvais, 193, 224, 231, 290

- Vincent, canon of Prague, 195
 Virgil, Roman author, 3, 23, 63, 72, 154, 286
 Viviane, Arthurian character, 258
 Vladimir Monomakh, prince of Kiev, 225
 Vladislav II, King of Bohême, 195
 Volmar, monk, 190, 217
 Vortigern, Briton King, 307
 Vulcan, Roman god, 20
- Wace, 14, 21, 87, 127, 131, 138–9, 157, 209, 282, 308, 329
 Walchelin, priest, 244
 Waldensians, 355–6
 Wales (Britain), 43, 68, 91, 128, 142–3, 180, 215, 331
 Wallerstein (Swabia, Germany), 116
 Wallingford (Oxfordshire, England), 83–4
 Walter Map, 73, 75–7, 82, 86, 89, 127, 160, 228, 248, 271, 274, 310, 318, 355, 372
 Walter of Bibbesworth, 64
 Walter of Guisborough, 1
 Walter the Chancellor, 145
 Walter of Henley, 66
 Waltham (Essex, England), 360, 361, 372
 Wartburgkrieg, 114
 Warwick (England), 72, 185
 Wauchier de Denain, 143
 Wegland, mythical black-smith, 261
 Welf V, Duke of Bavaria, 48
 Wertheim (Bade-Württemberg, Germany), 161, 162
 Westminster (London, England), 105, 190, 374
 William Adelin, 49
 William Fitz Stephen, 50, 105, 286, 299
 William I, King of England, 1, 29, 112, 139, 223
 William II, King of England, 50, 105, 248, 298
 William I, King of Sicily, 77
 William II, King of Sicily, 57, 248, 298
- William IX, Duke of Aquitaine, 137, 143, 146, 305, 317, 330, 336, 341, 347
 William, Count of Arundel, 311
 William, Count of Toulouse, 238
 William, Count, dedicatee of Marie de France, 92
 William, Archbishop of York, 128
 William, Archbishop of Tyr, 82–3, 91
 William Longchamp, Bishop of Ely, 128–9
 William, monk of Canterbury, 311
 William Marshal, 77, 225
 William of Conches, 110, 254, 255, 345, 384
 William of Gorham, 185
 William of Malmesbury, 70, 71, 190, 269, 298, 330
 William of Newburgh, 248, 360
 William of Orleans, 165
 William of Tancarville, 310
 William of Volpiano, 59, 70
 Wilton (Wiltshire, England), 190, 201
 Wipon of Burgundy, 59
 Wirnt von Grafenberg, 117, 164–5, 240
 Wolfram von Eschenbach, 114, 161–3, 165, 204, 206, 240, 329, 393
 Woodstock (Oxfordshire, England), 199
- Xirivella (Valencia, Spain), 179
- Yolande de Nesle, Viscountess of Soissons, 198
 York (England), 32, 128, 138, 204
 Yvain, Arthurian character, 108, 197, 204, 241, 251, 294, 301, 332, 351
- Zbigniew, illegitimate son of the Duke of Poland, 42–3, 51
 Zimmermann, Michel, 5, 10, 87
 Zink, Michel, 66, 156, 171, 173, 176, 334
 Zirc (Hungary), 315
 Zumthor, Paul, 11–2, 137, 163
 Zurich (Switzerland), 130, 162, 165

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